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CONSTANCY
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—

VOL. I.

C O N S T A N C Y

AND

C O N T R I T I O N .

S' onesto amor può meritare mercede,
E se pietà può quant' ella suole,
Mercede avrò.

PETRARCA.

The crime of old, which seemed long dead
Lifts up again its head!

THOUGHTS IN PAST YEARS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONSTANCY.

CHAPTER I.

Oh! quante sono incantatrici, oh quanti
Incantator tra noi, che non si sanno,
Che con lor arti, uomini e donne amanti
Di sè, cangiando i visi lor, fatto hanno!

E con simulazion, menzogne e frodi
Legano i cor d'indissolubil nodi.

ARIOSTO.

LADY SYLVESTER came forward to receive her visitor with the utmost affection; taking both her hands in hers, she kissed her first on one cheek, and then on the other, exclaiming with great tenderness:

"My dearest girl, my sweet Mercedes, the very person in the world whom I most desired to see. You must come to me to-day. You must dine with me. I can hear of no excuse, my love. Arundel is coming up from Oxford instead of going into Yorkshire. You must dine with us, and afterwards we must take him to the opera,

for he will not stay at home all the evening; and he is so handsome that I like to show him. By the bye, of course, you were going?"

And she cast an inquiring glance at Mercedes.

Miss Ratcliffe coloured, and for a moment did not reply; then, with a slight embarrassment of manner, she said:

"In fact, dear Lady Sylvester, I had no intention of going to the opera to-night; for I have lent my box to Mrs. Johnson, my cousin."

"Dear me, that is unfortunate. Who did you say, my love? Mrs. Jackson—who is she?"

"Mrs. Johnson," replied Mercedes with more confidence, "is my cousin."

"Oh, indeed! But still if she have no box of her own, I should think that it would be quite the same to her what night she goes. Don't you agree with me, dearest? How kind and generous you always are! Always forgetting yourself and thinking of others! Well! *we* must stay at home to-night and let this tiresome Mrs. Johnson enjoy Donizetti's delightful music; unless, indeed, you like, as I said before, to lend her the box another evening."

Mercedes coloured: she felt ashamed to adopt Lady Sylvester's suggestion, and yet was very desirous to oblige her. She scarcely knew her cousin, and there was very little sympathy between the native refinement and the native vulgarity that alike distinguished them. Deliberation has long been proverbially dangerous, and

here, as usual, it afforded time for the enemy to gain the day. Mercedes, when she replied, did not refuse to accede to a proposal made by Lady Sylvester, that she should write a note to her cousin, explaining how she had thoughtlessly forgotten that her opera box had already been placed at the disposal of another friend. Having thus decided this point, Lady Sylvester turned the conversation immediately to other subjects, and found, or made, many opportunities of mentioning her son; but Mercedes felt a species of remorse at the idea of recalling the trifling act of kindness which she had performed, that prevented her from deriving the same pleasure from Lady Sylvester's society that it usually afforded her. Feeling her spirits flag, though she had not time to analyse the cause, she took leave of her friend sooner than she had intended and departed.

When alone, she began to think over the apology she had undertaken to offer; and on a calm recollection of it, she was so shocked to find herself on the brink of being guilty of such meanness as to commit a deliberate falsehood to paper that she burst into tears. What was she to do? Should she return to Lady Sylvester and declare her incapacity to act thus? How weak and childish an appearance would such conduct wear! Besides, it would convey a rebuke which she was certain was undeserved. Lady Sylvester could only have spoken without thought—a bright and consolatory idea entered her mind; and springing up in the car-

riage, she pulled the check-string impetuously, and desired the servant to drive immediately to the bookseller's. When there, she eagerly inquired what opera boxes for the evening were free ; there was only one remaining, and the price demanded for it was exorbitant. She hesitated for a moment ; the man respectfully assured her that inquiries elsewhere would be useless. Mercedes hesitated no longer, but cheerfully paying the price he named, drove home, and despatched the ticket of it to her cousin. She now felt partially restored to self-satisfaction, but still smarted a little under the sense of folly.

Perhaps this introduction of Mercedes to our readers will make them suspect that such an imputation would not be groundless. We will, therefore, explain who Mercedes was, and how she was situated. When we proceed to say that she was at this time only eighteen, remarkably beautiful, the only child of a most indulgent father, and motherless almost from her birth, we hope at once to engage feelings of interest and compassion on her side, that shall induce them to consider her faults, be they what they may, with a predisposition to leniency.

Mr. Ratcliffe, the father of Mercedes, was a merchant, whose career in commerce had been attended with singular success ; his wealth had increased to an enormous extent, and the interests of this child, the sole object of his affections, were the end of all his labours. Her mother was a Portuguese ; a woman whose remarkable beauty and

sweetness of disposition had won his love. Their union was productive of mutual happiness ; but she seemed to miss the warmth of her native skies, and daily faded away ; her unhappy husband was ere long forced to open his eyes to the fact that death was approaching with rapid strides. That she should immediately quit England was indispensable ; that he should accompany her was impossible. His duty to all engaged with him in the daring speculations in which he had embarked, forbid him to entertain the thought. In this agony of distress he knew not where to turn.

In early life, Mr. Ratcliffe had been united in ties of the strictest friendship with a young man considerably his senior, of the name of Wilmot, whom a taste for study, retired habits, and extreme shyness and reserve of nature, wholly unfitted for those active walks in life which, for Ratcliffe, possessed peculiar charms. His learning and his abilities qualified him to undertake with confidence the charge of pupils, and by so doing he gained a scanty subsistence, but was unable to entertain any hope of uniting himself to a woman to whom he had been long and sincerely attached. Ratcliffe felt much compassion for his situation, and he became greatly interested in his success. He was himself by no means so friendless as Wilmot ; and before he had decided on the avocation which he finally pursued, a gentleman offered him a small living in the church, telling him, that, with his abilities, he thought he might feel assured of rising

in this profession with much greater certainty, and at a less expense of anxiety and toil than in any to which the natural bent of his mind inclined him. But so total was the distaste that Ratcliffe felt for the quiet secluded life proposed to him, that he at once rejected the offer. With some hesitation, and more of fear than hope, he afterwards ventured to suggest to his friendly patron the substitution of Wilmot instead of himself; and to his joy, his suggestion was favourably received. Great was the gratitude of the two persons whom he thus contributed to make so unexpectedly happy; and a day arrived in which they manifested the sincerity and strength of their feeling towards him yet more in actions than in words. At the time when Mr. Ratcliffe was so deeply distressed at the prospect of sending his young wife, perhaps, to die in a foreign land, Mrs. Wilmot came forward and offered to accompany her to Madeira, and to remain there during the winter with her.

Such a proposition, as little to be hoped for as to be requested, was, after the combat of many scruples, at last accepted; and Mrs. Wilmot attended for months on the unfortunate invalid with the unwearied care of a sister. She finally expired in her arms, commending the infant Mercedes, who had remained beneath her father's roof, to her love. This injunction she had but little opportunity of obeying. The young heiress was the object of too much solicitude to need the care of the humble

clergyman's wife, and in the privacy of her country life she soon lost sight of her charge.

We have said enough to show that Mr. Ratcliffe was a man of a generous disposition and a warm heart ; his character also bore strong marks of ambition and vanity. The first had obtained all the food it desired in the high station he had reached, and the esteem and repute which he had long enjoyed ; but the gratifications that the latter looked for were to be procured only through his child.

Her beauty—so like her mother's—her loveliness, her excellence, were the themes on which his thoughts still ran ; for her he toiled—for her he amassed riches ; and he deemed no alliance worthy of her but with the highest of the land. He had aspirations for her far beyond any he had ever had for himself. He had never sought favour with the great ; he had never coveted their titles ; on the contrary, he had been well content to rank himself as one of the most distinguished of the aristocracy of wealth, and neither envied nor flattered those who were numbered in the aristocracy of rank. But as his child grew old enough to enter into society, such a “change came o'er the spirit of his dream,” that he really felt more gratitude to Lady Sylvester for the fondness which she lavished on his daughter, than had ever been excited by him for any benefit received, except, indeed, by the attendance of Mrs. Wilmot on her dying mother.

Though Mr. Ratcliffe thus betrayed great weakness, and an undue estimation of the pomps and vanities of the world, his affection for his child was far too strong to allow him to place any object in competition with her happiness. She was not the tool with which his ambition designed to work; her welfare was in all sincerity the object he had in view; therefore, while he confided his daughter to Lady Sylvester he could not divest himself of many an anxious care on her account. In spite of his willingness to be blinded, he could not wholly blind himself to the dangers of the position which he had chosen for her. He could not be ignorant that many a scheme would be laid to entrap the heiress of so much reputed wealth; he knew that her simplicity and her youth would be practised on by many deceivers; and he felt that as long as she was at the mercy of the fashionable multitude with which he had bid her mingle he should never know peace of mind.

In his anxiety to secure her from the perils which he foresaw, but from which nevertheless he would not withdraw her, he attempted to arm her against them by revealing to her their existence; by preparing her to distrust, and teaching her to examine. So much had he insisted on the mercenary motives which he told her would actuate most of those who would address her in terms of flattering devotion, that she shrank in terror away from much that would otherwise have allured her. Entrusted as she was to Lady Sylvester,

she believed that in her, her father must have confidence; and sick of suspicion, which was most repugnant to her nature, she delighted in the idea that she was permitted to love her friend without pausing for scrutiny, and to trust in the sincerity of the love which was professed in return.

With Lord Sylvester, the present Viscount, Mr. Ratcliffe was well acquainted, and for him he felt an esteem that he accorded to few. The manly uprightness and simplicity of his character, the singular amiability of his deportment towards his equals, his inferiors, and his dependants; the self-respect and self-reliance which all his actions evinced, excited Mr. Ratcliffe's unqualified approbation. The possibility of an attachment to his daughter springing up in the heart of the young nobleman, was by no means an unpleasing subject of meditation to Mr. Ratcliffe; but he did not disguise from himself that, as his personal appearance was even less than commonly prepossessing, and as his devotion to arts and learning, his studious habits, and consequent abstraction from general society, had hitherto induced him to allow his youth to pass on without forming any alliance, though rank, wealth, and beauty were alike within his reach, it was highly improbable that he would be the first to seek, and still more so, that he would be the first to win the affections of so young and lovely a woman as his daughter. Still it pleased him to imagine that in the eagerness

with which Lady Sylvester sought Miss Ratcliffe's acquaintance he could read a similar desire, and it was with disappointment and a secret misgiving, that he casually discovered that she was only the step-mother of the present Viscount; and that she had a son then at the university. This discovery caused him to feel a degree of uncertainty as to her plans for the future; but the intimacy which had already sprung up was too flattering to his vanity, and afforded too many present advantages to his daughter, to allow him rashly to cut it short; and, besides, he could not resolve to deprive Mercedes of an intercourse which seemed to give her so much pleasure.

CHAPTER II.

If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.

POPE.

Son propre est de donner du tour à ce qu'il dit, et de la grâce à ce qu'il fait.

MERCEDES felt herself stimulated by the expectation of meeting the son of her friend for the first time, to bestow more than ordinary care on her toilette. His mother had always spoken of him so much, and so tenderly; he was so evidently the idol of her heart, and the object of all her ambition; she was so engrossed by plans for his future advantage, so sanguine in her expectations of success that awaited him, that Mercedes, influenced by the warm affection that Lady Sylvester's lavished kindness had already won from her, for her sake regarded him with an interest beyond that of mere curiosity.

Perhaps Mercedes was vain; she was certainly not without pride—defensive, not offensive pride. She saw that her father aspired to place her in a rank of society above that to which her birth and station entitled her; such as in fact could only be purchased by his wealth. But to dwell upon this

fact was too mortifying ; it pleased her better to believe that the charms of her person, and the qualities of her mind, when seen and known, would not be without weight ; and it also pleased her better to attribute those sarcasms which the conduct of the father called forth, and which sometimes reached the ears of the daughter, wholly to envy and jealousy, rather than to give any consideration to the truths which they in some measure contained. Still, in spite of thus striving to fortify herself against all rude antagonists, she entered those circles in which she felt her footing to be insecure, and her reception doubtful, with some reluctance, and a shyness, partly arising from her unprotected youth, and partly from a species of proud humility that made her shrink from those whom she felt to be at once above and below her.

In this uncomfortable state of mind, the extreme kindness which she met with from Lady Sylvester, the acknowledged fascination of her manners ; her perfect self-possession and knowledge of every thing which it was desirable for Mercedes to know ; the ready tact and unoppressive good nature with which she instructed and directed her, gave a charm to her society to which Mercedes was naturally fully alive. “*Soyez complaisant sans faire valoir vos complaisances,*” is the advice of a French author ; and Mercedes would have said that the injunction was never more completely fulfilled than by her beloved Lady Sylvester.

Miss Ratcliffe had heard from many that this family were remarkable for the pride of high birth; probably this information rendered doubly delightful the cordial affection which she met with from her newly found friend. But, in the progress of their acquaintance she felt disposed to acquiesce in the truth of the imputation, even as relating to her individually, so far, that had any one said to her: "Lady Sylvester designs you for her son," she would have ridiculed and rejected the supposition. She had been led to imagine, from all she had observed and all she had heard, that nothing would occasion a severer mortification to Lady Sylvester, than for Mr. Wentworth to ally himself with a woman of obscure birth; and the total disregard for money which she evinced by the encouragement to lavish expenditure which Mercedes received from her, and of which she set her the example, forbid the thought that mercenary motives could have force to conquer this bias of her mind. Such was the impression that Lady Sylvester made on her young companion. Whether this was done involuntarily or intentionally; whether it was a true or a false one, our tale will reveal.

Mercedes on her arrival was again received by Lady Sylvester with as many demonstrations of tenderness as in the morning. She then presented her son to her with an air of proud delight, and seemed scarcely able to refrain from demanding a tribute of praise from her, even before she had heard him speak. The hour of dinner passed on

agreeably ; for as Mr. Wentworth had not spent an evening in the society of his mother and brother for many months, he now did so without experiencing any insupportable degree of *ennui*. He was not at all disappointed in the expectations which his mother had raised with regard to the beauty of her young *protégée* ; and from the moment that he perceived the friendliness that subsisted between her and Lord Sylvester, he was seized with a desire to make her feel how immeasurably superior were his own powers of attraction to those possessed by his brother ; and also to efface effectually from her mind all other candidates for her favour that had yet appeared. No spirit of emulation, however, was excited in his brother ; who, on the contrary, was more than usually silent. He was secretly occupied in observing with no small curiosity the conduct of both his mother and his brother, nor did he remark with indifference the effect which it seemed likely to produce on the object of it.

Mercedes ceased to feel surprise at the maternal pride and affection of Lady Sylvester, when she became acquainted with their object. Arundel's person presented a most striking resemblance to that of his mother, who was still distinguished for her remarkable beauty. His countenance and manner were lively ; his conversation, though superficial, was sparkling with ready wit, and animated by an eager desire to please. In all these respects he afforded a complete contrast to his elder brother.

Lord Sylvester was usually silent and abstracted ; he could speak well on those subjects in which he was interested ; on others he did not often speak at all. He seldom expressed his opinions so as to make them evident to any but those who were of the number of his friends. He was rather slow to show either his likings or his dislikes ; his manner was uniformly polite to his equals and to his inferiors ; deferential only to those whose characters he approved, whose abilities he admired, or whose age he revered. His voice, always pleasing, was peculiarly kind and gentle when he addressed either women or children ; it was not the fulsome or unmeaning language of flattery that he gave as a tribute to the former ; his address was rather such as a mother or a sister would desire, and would repay with grateful affection.

To these excellent qualities Mercedes was not insensible ; and she entertained a sincere friendship for Lord Sylvester, who had always treated her with marked consideration and attention ; for he easily perceived that in many respects her tastes, feelings, and natural bent of mind amalgamated with his own ; and could discern that her intellectual powers, though as yet little developed from want of cultivation, were of a superior order. But much as Mercedes esteemed him, she had never seen him display that brilliancy which she perceived in his brother, nor any of that vivacity to which the sprightliness of youth gives a charm almost as great as that possessed by wit ; she did

not believe that his presence could diffuse the same life which that of his brother seemed so capable of imparting to any circle into which he should enter. New to the world, and a stranger to aught but prosperity, Mercedes was far too happy to be difficult to please. Lady Sylvester soon found an opportunity of ascertaining that her wishes, with regard to the opera, had been complied with and Lord Sylvester left the field entirely open to Wentworth by declining to accompany them thither.

Miss Ratcliffe had no sooner entered her box and placed herself in her usual seat, than she perceived that her cousin's party was at a little distance, and quite within sight of them. She well knew that Mrs. Johnson's heart would be overflowing with gratitude and delight, which would doubtless be expressed by "nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles;" and when she glanced at Arundel at her side, she almost repented that she had placed herself in a situation of so much annoyance. As soon, however, as she saw that she was recognised beyond a doubt, she summoned up all the courage she possessed, and bowed her head in acknowledgment of the many tokens of greeting which she received from them. Having thus accomplished her duty, she for the first time ventured to raise her eyes to the faces of her companions, in order to learn from their countenances, what effect the personal vulgarity and *outré* attire of those whom she was forced to acknowledge as

relatives had upon them ;—but the imperturbability of good breeding saved her from reading anything there that could add to her embarrassment.

In time, therefore, she regained her satisfaction, and listened with pleasure to the remarks of Arundel, when suddenly directing her eyes (by that strange fatality that always forces them to turn in the direction of any object of aversion) towards the party she regarded with so much dismay, she saw emerging in the back ground the head of the heir of the house of Johnson, the eldest hope of the family ! From that moment her enjoyment was effectually destroyed ; she was seized with the apprehension that he at least would pay her a visit, and every time the door opened, she started in expectation of hearing the loud, familiar greeting of her cousin, who she knew professed to honour her with his particular admiration. She thought too with horror of the probability of encountering them in leaving the house, of being watched and waylaid by them ; she reproached herself with her weak compliance with her friend's unreasonable request, and began to see the indelicacy of it. Half disposed to be displeased, she turned abruptly to Lady Sylvester, and telling her that she had a head-ache, expressed her wish to return home as soon as the opera was concluded, without waiting for the ballet. By this arrangement she knew that her departure would far precede that of her cousin, who would have a lauda-

ble desire of deriving all possible enjoyment from the unusual means of pleasure afforded to her. Lady Sylvester, who was perfectly alive to the cause of her annoyance, saw that it would be injudicious at this moment to trifle with her feelings or to differ from her wishes, so instantly assuming a tone of affectionate interest, she expressed the utmost impatience to comply with her request, which they accordingly did.

“And this is the end of an anticipated evening of pleasure!” exclaimed Mercedes, as after leaving Lady Sylvester at her own house, she threw herself back in her carriage and experienced inexpressible relief in solitude.

On the following day, however, she found reason to rejoice that the occurrences of the past evening were no worse than they had been. At a very early hour, Mrs. Johnson and her daughters arrived, “Determined,” as she said, “to find her at home and not to be disappointed of seeing her.” As she uttered these words, Mercedes shrank from her embrace, and offering her a seat with as good a grace as she could assume, placed herself beside her. Mrs. Johnson, as if to detain her (though she really had no design of moving, however great might be her desire to do so) placed her large and heavy hand on her arm, and began to pour forth her thanks which were echoed by each of her cousins.

These acknowledgments, to which she listened

unwillingly, feeling that she scarcely deserved them were followed by inquiries of—"How did you get there? I am sure you might have come with us if you had liked; there was room enough for another twice your size. There was no occasion for you to go in any one's box but your own. Pray, who were you with?"

"Lady Sylvester," replied Mercedes faintly.

"Oh! one of your grand friends. Fred wanted to pay you a visit, but we told him that the box certainly must belong to the lady with you, and as he did not know her, he might as well stay where he was. Indeed, at first when I saw you so near," added Mrs. Johnson, "I had more than half a mind to drop in myself just to say a word to you, but the girls would not hear of it."

Mercedes never felt so affectionately disposed towards her cousins as on hearing of the visitation from which they had saved her. Still, after a little further conversation, she could not refrain from looking at her watch in a manner that signified that other engagements called her from them. This action being repeated, drew forth an inquiry from Mrs. Johnson as to what she was going to do with herself.

"I have ordered my carriage early to-day," said Mercedes.

"Indeed! You must often be very lonely, my dear. I am sure whenever you want a companion in a drive, one of my girls will always be happy to go with you. You don't see enough of each

other for cousins ; I don't know how it is. Are you by yourself to-day ?”

“No ; Lady Sylvester will be with me. I shall call for her.”

This reply silenced Mrs. Johnson, who now took her departure.

In fact, Mr. Ratcliffe's relations showed a wonderful anxiety to undertake the care of his motherless child, hoping probably to participate in the advantages of her father's wealth, which he so liberally communicated to her ; and they appeared to consider themselves injured and aggrieved, when he uniformly declined their proffered services, and chose to select her companions and friends in another rank from that to which she was by birth most closely allied.

Mercedes, however, found it easy to check Mrs. Johnson's vulgar importunity, but not so to resist the delicate advances of Lady Sylvester.

CHAPTER III.

“L’homme n’est que déguisement, que mensonge, et hypocrisie, et en soi-même, et à l’égard des autres. Ainsi la vie humaine n’est qu’une illusion perpétuelle ; on ne fait que s’entre-tromper et s’entre-flatter.”—PASCAL.

“YOUR presence here, my dear Arundel,” said Lady Sylvester, “far from being productive of any good consequences, can do nothing but harm. Mr. Ratcliffe has little intention of giving his beautiful daughter to the younger son of a Viscount. To your brother he would not perhaps object, but I see no danger threatening in that quarter. The grounds of my fears at present are these : Mercedes never will ‘unwooed be won ;’ and if you attempt to win her, she will be taken from us, re-instated in her father’s house, and consigned to the care of some respectable relative, such as we saw last night, which would be very sad for her, poor thing, as well as for us. So this we will not provoke. Indeed, I have foreseen and prepared for all such difficulties long since.”

“What an unattainable talent you have for intrigue, plot, and counterplot, dear mother,” replied Arundel, who found much amusement in listening to the development of his mother’s plans.

“Talleyrand might have respected you, and no doubt would have profited much by the possession of such an advantage as I have in listening to you.”

“I believe it,” answered Lady Sylvester complacently. “But I have much to say which shall demand still more admiration. In order to have this pretty child completely at my own disposal, I deem it absolutely necessary to remove her from under her father’s eye. She loves him passionately; and I know that every night of her life, when she returns to him, she repeats every occurrence, trifling or important, of the past day. While she can do this, we have little power to go against his inclinations. Whatever you do will immediately be made known to him, and if you make the slightest progress in the young lady’s affections, it will be quickly visible to his anxious eye. Therefore I advise you to go away before you have made an impression at all. I wish I could hope that she would not even mention your name to him.”

“Can you suppose that all my conversational powers were exerted in vain last night? You do not estimate them properly, and you forget that she has *seen* me.”

“Conceited creature! we women do not surrender to a handsome face as you do. We accept homage, we do not pay it. So beautiful a girl as Mercedes Ratcliffe loves to receive the tribute of admiration rather than to give it.”

“ But, mother, if you banish me now, when and where are we to meet again ?”

“ At Philippi !” replied Lady Sylvester. “ Listen, and you shall hear a master-stroke of policy. I have actually, previously to your arrival, obtained from her father a consent that she shall pass the winter with me in Italy ; and why should you not come out to us and do the same ?”

“ I will come *with* you, if you like ; and *strada facendo*, I can make love more pleasantly, and with less inconvenience than at any other time.”

“ How can you suppose it possible that I shall allow you to leave England with us ? And do not, I beg, let me ever hear again of trouble or inconvenience, when I am offering you a golden prize that half the eldest sons in England might covet. You must not prove ‘ a peevish school-boy, worthless of such honour.’ ”

“ Honour !” repeated Arundel, tossing his head haughtily ; “ I think that the blood of the Wentworths was hardly meant to mix its current with the muddy stream that flows in the veins of a citizen’s daughter.”

And the colour that mounted on his cheek showed that his pride really smarted at this thought. Lady Sylvester regarded him for a moment with a smile of derision, which expression however she chose to qualify by a mixture of admiration ; and then she said,

“ Well, I intend to avail myself of this little ebullition of pride, which is not altogether uncon-

genial to my own temper, and shall make use of it to impress on Mercedes's mind a sense of the greatness of the honour we shall confer on her by permitting such an union, and the disinterestedness and strength of the attachment that can incline us to do so."

"Indeed, my dear mother," replied Arundel, not without a sneer, "you will be very clever, or Miss Ratcliffe very silly, if you can carry imposition to such a length. In the meantime, if I am not to stay here, I shall run down to Dovor and see my friend Norton. He is there with his sister, Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, whose husband is too ill to cross the channel. If he were to depart this life, the fair widow (whom by the bye I am very desirous to behold) would offer no bad speculation for younger sons; and you, mother, I am sure, must approve of my providing two strings to my bow."

Such was the conversation which was interrupted by the arrival of Miss Ratcliffe, according to her appointment; and Lady Sylvester despatched Arundel to invite her to enter, as she was not ready to accompany her immediately. She wished to receive her with her customary demonstration of affection, and then turning to Arundel, she said:

"You may amuse Miss Ratcliffe while I prepare to go out; and if you succeed tolerably well, I will reward you by begging her to allow you to accompany us."

So saying she left the room, leaving Arundel

disposed to obey her injunctions, and by no means distrusting his powers of doing so. But if Lady Sylvester's raillery had caused him no embarrassment, it was not so with Mercedes: she blushed deeply, and replied entirely *à tort et à travers* to some very trifling remark with which he commenced the conversation. Her mind was still running on the disagreeable remembrance of the past evening, and she thought that in the eyes of Wentworth she could only appear as a citizen's daughter for whom her father's wealth had purchased a station in society which was entirely a false one, and for which the vulgarity of her associates at home must wholly disqualify her. And this was in fact the light in which Mr. Wentworth did regard her. That her own innate refinement and superior qualities of mind gave her a distinction above that which is merely conventional, Wentworth was not quick to discover as his brother had been; nor would this knowledge have won from him any feeling of respect so great as that which he was disposed to pay to her wealth. He was, it is true, rejoiced to find the two possessions of beauty and riches, those which were alone able to engage his affections, so closely united in an uncommon degree. His vanity, which he had expected to find deeply mortified by this projected alliance was, on the contrary, gratified at the idea of carrying off a prize as fitted to excite the passion of love as that of avarice. Mercedes could not but comply with Lady Sylvester's request; and

Wentworth accompanied them in their drive. In the agreeable conversation that ensued, Mercedes forgot the mortification she had experienced. Every succeeding hour seemed to strengthen Lady Sylvester's hopes of final success ; but she was too wise to allow the elation of triumph to induce her to alter the plan of action which she had laid out with so much previous reflection. She would not defer Arundel's banishment a single day beyond the one originally fixed, but rigidly insisted on his departure ; particularly as she was alarmed by an inquiry from Mr. Ratcliffe as to whether Arundel was to accompany them in their visit to the continent. To this she replied in the negative.

"We shall not want Arundel," she said, "for Sylvester will be with us."

She therefore eagerly dismissed Arundel, agreeing with him that they were to meet at Rome in November. She by no means desired that his rising passion should cool during the intervening months ; and perceived with displeasure that he ceased to manifest his first impatience for the time to arrive when he might rejoin them. He wrote to tell her, that he designed to solace himself by accompanying the Annesly Marchmonts in a tour in the south of France, previously to entering Italy for the winter. He accordingly remained with them until they reached Florence in the autumn, where he soon received an angry and urgent letter from his mother, who desired him to reach the imperial city on the same day that

she expected to enter it. She made also many general comments on the ingratitude and imprudence of youth, and on the folly of her son in particular ; but as she brought no definite accusations against him, he passed over her displeasure in silence, and proposed to appease it by setting out for Rome without any delay, where he arrived on the very day that the courier attending on Lady Sylvester's party, and paid by Mr. Ratcliffe, had established them in apartments in the palazzo —, in the vicinity of the Pincian Hill.

CHAPTER IV.

His bosom mild, the favouring muse
Had stored with all her ample views.
Parent of fairest deeds, and purposes sublime.

WARTON.

It was with surprise and pleasure that Mr. Ratcliffe, a few days after he parted from his daughter, received a visit from his old friend Mr. Wilmot, whom he had not now seen for several years. They had, for a time, kept up a regular correspondence, but even this had been gradually allowed to fall to the ground, for business accumulated with each of them. The retired minister of the church found his time not less occupied by the cares of his parish than was that of his more enterprising friend by his mercantile undertakings; and they found it so little possible to convey to each other any clear comprehension of the very different interests by which they were mutually engrossed, that, as their letters grew to contain little else than assurances of a friendship of which neither had ever doubted the strength or the sincerity, they at length ceased altogether, unless any unusual event occurred which they felt desirous to communicate.

This had been the case with Mr. Ratcliffe till his daughter had quitted England, when, oppressed by a sense of loneliness, his thoughts had turned to the one true friend whom he knew he possessed, and to the tender proofs of regard which he had received from him and from his wife; and he sat down and wrote a letter to Wilmot, to which his arrival brought a most welcome answer. Not, indeed, that it was occasioned by it; affairs that came to an unexpected crisis summoned him to town; breaking in as it did upon the even tenor of his uneventful life, this occurrence was rather productive of pleasure than of annoyance. The age which his only child had attained made it necessary to select a profession for him, as the smallness of his father's means left him chiefly dependent on his own exertion; and Mr. Wilmot thought that in personal interviews with some noble and wealthy friends of former days, with whom familiar intercourse had long since ceased, he might, without any sacrifice of dignity, interest them in the fortunes of his son. He found himself not altogether disappointed in these hopes. By some of his friends he was remembered—by some forgotten; many gracious speeches were listened to, and some kind assurances believed.

It was chiefly to Mr. Ratcliffe that he looked for assistance and advice. The long cessation of intercourse between them seemed only to heighten their satisfaction in meeting again, and they passed every evening together of the short period which

Mr. Wilmot meant to spend in London. Their conversation naturally turned to the past in which they had been mutually interested, rather than to the present in which they had little connexion with each other; but they also dwelt upon the future, for they both had children. Mr. Wilmot's only son was not less precious to his heart than was the merchant's orphan daughter to that of her father. Mr. Ratcliffe eagerly inquired into the character, the prospects, and the wishes of Julian Wilmot; sincerely desiring to serve the father through the son, and to prove the liveliness of that gratitude which had never expired, and which the sight of his friend fanned into a brighter flame.

"My son," replied Mr. Wilmot to Mr. Ratcliffe's earnest inquiries, "is now nineteen. From his childhood I had entertained a not unnatural wish to educate him to my own profession, the exercise of which I prefer to that of any other more likely to lead to emolument and worldly distinctions; for, highly as I have been always inclined to rate Julian's abilities, so entirely are we destitute of any advantages of interest or connexion, that I believe I may honestly affirm that ambition can have little to do with the choice of this career for him. Indeed, the motives which chiefly directed my choice, were founded on my close and anxious study of my child's peculiar disposition. The gentleness and lively sensibility which are alike predominant in him, joined to a reserve and timidity existing to a painful degree when he is thrown among stran-

gers, but which give place to the most ingenuous candour and the utmost affectionate willingness to confide every thought and feeling when with those he loves, make me think him little suited to wrestle with the world where he would find himself,

“Checked by the scoff of pride and envy’s frown,
And poverty’s unconquerable bar.”

How often has the character drawn by the poet whom I quote, reminded his mother and me most forcibly of our child !

“I also narrowly observed him in order to detect from whence sprung the excessive ardour with which he pursued the different studies to which I directed him, having myself been his sole preceptor. I decided that it arose more from the enthusiasm of his nature, and the harmony that existed between his spirit and those master-minds whose imperishable works formed his objects of study, than from the yearnings of emulous ambition. In all these pursuits, it was rather the present enjoyment than the future hope, that incited his indefatigable efforts. I have now discovered that an ardent thirst of fame is in his heart, but seeks its gratification by other means.

“From his very childhood, my son has displayed a most remarkable passion, I may say genius, for painting. The delight he took in nature, and the faithfulness of the attempts he made to portray her features, excited the observation of every one around us; and such as could assist him in the culti-

vation of this talent, most kindly did so. Before long this passion, for in him it is nothing less, began to supersede all other studies. The poets and historians which I placed in his hands, soon bore on every blank leaf and margin, the illustration of each lively image or affecting scene that struck his fancy; and I would often reprove what nevertheless excited my admiration. Every page of the *Iliad* in his possession would corroborate what I am saying. There we have Achilles in the council of heroes, restrained from striking Agamemnon by the interference of Minerva, who places her hand in the hair of the impetuous warrior and draws him back. We see him again weeping bitterly on the sea-shore, with his beautiful mother rising from the waves to console her son. Often on his mother's birthday will he present her with portfolios enriched with the most exquisitely graceful designs, which are however but the fruits of his idle hours.

“Among these, his subjects are chiefly selected from Shakspeare, whom he knows to be equally their favourite. One of those, at this moment present to my mind, is a design for a frontispiece to the ‘Two Gentlemen of Verona,’ which is composed of a number of small sketches, divided from each other by elegant wreaths of flowers and ornamental scrolls, and which united present an epitome of the whole play. The first is the embarkation of Valentine; the second is the leaving-taking of Julia and Proteus; the two lower ones

are Silvia returning to Valentine the verses she had engaged him to write, and Silvia in the balcony reproaching Proteus, who is attended by the love-sick Julia ; while the centre represents the final scene in the wood, where Valentine proffers the hand of Silvia to his friend, whose attention is distracted by the fainting Julia at his side.

“ Forgive me for dwelling thus on minute details which to you can possess little interest. That such manifestations of genius were viewed with fond partiality by his parents, you will easily believe ; and he has found his friends equally disposed to admire. Lord Camville, who resides near us and is a man of much taste and knowledge, has, by opening to him his extensive gallery, afforded him an unhopèd-for advantage in the pursuit of the study of his art.

“ Perhaps it will scarcely surprise you to hear that when about a year back I offered to send him to the university, he declined to avail himself of my proposal, declaring that the attendant expense would be very ill-advised, as he never intended to practise any profession that called for such an education ; that he felt that his sole vocation was that of a painter, and on no other could he willingly enter. This avowal at first certainly caused me some pain ; but Julian, not less firm than he is gentle, finally obtained my consent to make his own decision. I expected that his mother would have been even more averse than myself to allow a resolution to be carried into effect which, in the

eyes of the many, would we knew be considered to place our son below the station which I had intended him to hold. But here I found her disposed to adopt Julian's opinions, and to abide by his wishes. He boldly asserted that he held it to be no degradation to make those talents which are especial and unattainable gifts of Heaven, the means of procuring an honest competence. 'And in what profession,' he asked, 'can a subsistence be earned more honourably than in that which I have chosen? Is it not free from the many temptations to dishonesty which beset those considered to hold a higher rank? The lawyer may be tempted, for the sake of gain, to uphold by specious reasoning the wrong against the right, and to foster the malignance of human passions. The soldier may be paid to draw his sword in a cause which his heart abhors; and some will intrude even into the Church's holy sanctuary, who seek only the loaves and the fishes. I must stand or fall by my own merits, protected and sought only by those who approve me.'

"If such be his determination, it is time that he put it into execution; and I see plainly that he passionately desires to fly to the land of painters, where they have attained most excellence, earned most fame, been best loved, and most esteemed. Julian, who had not displayed any symptoms of ambition before, looks to his art with an ardent desire for distinction."

"And let him earn it!" exclaimed Mr. Rat-

cliffe, who had heard with interest his friend's narrative. "Let us assist him to earn it," and before their conversation came to a close, he proposed with equal generosity and delicacy that Mr. Wilmot should immediately summon his son to join him in London, bringing with him such specimens of his powers as were yet in being, which he would undertake to submit to competent judges. Mr. Ratcliffe went on to propose, that according to their advice his present routine should be marked out, and that if a course of study in Italy were most desirable, it should be afforded him at his expense.

With this liberal proposal, after some scruples of delicacy, and with the expression of the warmest gratitude, Mr. Wilmot was induced to reply; and accordingly wrote to his son to inform him of it. Julian obeyed with alacrity injunctions that promised so well for his future career; it had long been his eager desire to meet with an opening such as might authorize him to entertain any rational hopes of final success. The ardour of his feelings on this point vanquished the repugnance which he had to receive benefits in general, and his mother reminded him that the friendship which existed between his father and the wealthy merchant had hitherto been supported by mutual services, and that if the balance of gratitude was now on their side, his well-founded anticipations of success might enable him ere long to make that return to his generous patron which was probably the one that would be most really acceptable to him.

The reception which Julian met with from Mr. Ratcliffe, the kindness and almost parental interest which he showed him, reassured him at once and excited in his affectionate nature the warmest feelings of gratitude; and the circumstance of his father being there to support him, prevented his delicacy and his self-respect from receiving, or fancying that they received any wound.

Mr. Ratcliffe was indeed thoughtfully considerate on every subject, however trifling, that could affect the interest or the feelings of his young *protégé*. He was singularly pleased with his whole demeanour, with his handsome and intelligent countenance, his unstudied eloquence springing from the heart, his ingenuousness and simplicity, and the earnestness and yet manly dignity with which he acknowledged a sense of obligation to his favours. He sought, not less for his own satisfaction than for that of the young artist and his father, the opinions of all those whom he considered most competent to advise him before the important decision was finally made; and he found himself fully corroborated in the opinion he had formed, that the passionate desire of the youthful painter evinced to make the exercise of his favourite art the chief occupation of his life was not founded on any false estimation of his latent powers, but was the voice of genius that would be heard, and an indication of the existence of those powers which are the gift of heaven, not the acquisition of the most indefatigable of the sons of men.

After Julian had spent a few weeks beneath his roof, and afforded him the fullest satisfaction, both as the son of his friend and with regard to a hope of future success, Mr. Ratcliffe most liberally provided him with the means of spending the following winter in Italy, and in order to forward his interests in every way in his power, he gave him letters to his daughter in which he strongly recommended him to Lord Sylvester, whose generous disposition and cultivated taste would, he thought, render him able and willing to be of essential service to the young painter, as inexperienced in the world as he was at present in his art.

Julian returned with his father to his home to bid his mother farewell, and with a truly grateful heart, took leave of his patron.

CHAPTER V.

Le nom seul de Rome est magique pour le voyageur qui arrive dans son enceinte ! Etre à Rome paraît une sorte d'honneur, un des nobles évènements, un des futurs et grands souvenirs de notre vie.

Si Rome est le premier but du voyageur en Italie, St. Pierre est la première merveille qu'il recherche, et que ses yeux contemplent.

VALÉRY.

"WE are in Rome!" exclaimed Mercedes.
 "What joy ! Dear Lady Sylvester, do not you feel happy, happier than you ever felt before ? Do not you say with the poet—

"I am in Rome ! I cry
 Whence this excess of joy ? What has befall'n me ?
 And from within a thrilling voice replies :
 Thou art in Rome ! A thousand busy thoughts
 Rush on my mind ! A thousand images ;
 And I spring up, as girt to run a race."

Lord Sylvester smiled at her ecstasy—he was turning over the leaves of a book he had been reading, as if in search of some particular passage, and when he found it, he pointed out the page to Mercedes, and bid her read it :—

"Chiunque abbia alquanto gustato le delizie dell' antica erudizione mi farà testimonianza quai

palpiti sente il cuore, allorchè scendendo l' Appennino la via declina alla celebrata città. Le pupille sono intente a scoprire la sommità dei sette colli ; il petto brama lanciarsi tra preziosi monumenti ; ogni pietra di antico edificio per la via è materia di dotte congiunture e d'immagini deliziose.”*

“ How true !” said Mercedes, as she ended ; “ but still, though this passage describes my feelings so exactly, the cause that it assigns for them is more peculiarly felt by you. Perhaps my chief associations and desires are rather attached neither to ancient nor yet to modern Italy, but to Italy of the middle ages. It is the Italy of the poets and the painters that I love with an almost personal affection. The Italy of Raphael and of Michael Angelo ; and now that I know them, many other names are become dear to me that never reached my ears before I came here ; those, for instance, of Masaccio, of Cimabue, of Pinturiccio, of Perugino, of Garofolo, and others too many to enumerate ; while the very air of Italy inspires me with more vivid reminiscences of Dante, of Petrarca, of Ariosto, and I long to see where Tasso died, and read his name on his humble grave-stone with deeper feelings of tenderness and veneration than, I think, the stately monument of later days that honours Santa Croce can awake.”

“ Well,” replied Lord Sylvester, “ you must banish for a while these charming reveries, but only in order to realize them. Are you calm

* Verri.

enough to fix on any single object that you desire to see?"

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Mercedes eagerly; then pausing, she more thoughtfully continued: "St. Peter's, the Coliseum, that grand monument of Rome itself!"

"A thousand images" did indeed rush into her mind, and she was lost among them.

"Let us go to St. Peter's," said Lady Sylvester.

Arundel, who was with them, did not offer to accompany them; but after a short silence, he said with an air which was not quite so unembarrassed as it was designed to be:

"I will not undertake to be your cicerone, mother. Sylvester, who has been here before will do all that better; much more to your satisfaction and to Miss Racliffe's. You see how my modesty and anxiety for your true interests lead me to make a great sacrifice. I, however, must also be employed in your service, though in a different way. I will get you a carriage and horses if you please; I am admirably qualified to select them; and before we meet at dinner, I will be *en état* to tell you every one who is in Rome; every thing that is likely to happen during the ensuing week; your names shall be properly inscribed in Monaldini's book, and to-morrow every acquaintance that you have here shall be made aware of the momentous fact of your arrival."

Mercedes was far too much absorbed in the idea that a few short hours would place her within St.

Peter's to listen to the whole of Arundel's speech ; she was rather astonished that he should willingly defer so great a pleasure, but too much occupied in the anticipation of it, to perceive all the annoyance which his mother felt, or to share greatly in it herself.

Mercedes threw herself back in the carriage determined to reserve all her emotions that day for St. Peter's. Her companions seemed by their mere presence to disturb her ; she resolutely maintained silence, and refused to allow her attention to be attracted by any of the new and passing objects around her.

As soon as they found themselves on the Bridge of St. Angelo, she leaned forward at Lord Sylvester's instigation, to catch perhaps the most excellent view of the majestic dome that is to be had within the city. She gazed silently on the gracefully swelling outline, relieved by the deep and cloudless blue sky, and felt her expectations rising even to a painful degree. The moment that they entered the Piazza, she started up in the carriage, eager to behold the first revealed view of the façade ; but as soon as she had perceived it, she turned to Lord Sylvester with a blank look of disappointment.

" Ah ! " she exclaimed, " where is the dome that looked so sublime a few minutes ago ? Now we have entirely lost sight of it. That ugly pile," she said, pointing to the Vatican, " looks as if it had overbearingly crushed it ! "

"True," replied Lord Sylvester; "your dissatisfaction is very just. It cannot be denied that, '*le premier temple de l'Europe se trouve avoir le caractère trivial d'un bâtiment d'habitation.*' But look now on this beautiful colonnade; these fountains that play so gracefully; that obelisk that aspires to heaven! You must acknowledge that it is, as has been justly remarked, 'the finest inclosure to the Piazza that could be imagined, and also a most fortunate screen to the ignoble objects that surround it. How many noble buildings stand in need of such a screen! See how vast is the area inclosed by these encircling arms! and how admirable the proportions of the colonnade itself!'"

Lady Sylvester and Mercedes participated in his just admiration; but the latter was too anxious to behold the interior to bestow her full attention on that which was without. She sprang from the carriage, and ran up the broad stone steps; she was struck with the grandeur of the vestibule which she now entered, and as Lord Sylvester raised the heavy curtain that impeded her entrance, she passed beneath it, and stood within the august temple.

"How proud a fabric to devotion given!"

When she thus first entered St. Peter's, she was overwhelmed with a sense of its surpassing grandeur; oppressed by, and lost in a vague perception of its vastness. How ardent a wish she felt to be there alone, at least undisturbed and un-

restrained by the presence of companions, in order to contemplate it in silence. She felt a desire to abide there to gaze on its awful majesty from sunrise to sunset, to watch every changing effect, from the brightening of day to the shadows of evening and the gloom of night ! She regarded it as the most sublime temple that man could hope to frame ; and she could have wept to think that we have been forced to turn away from the ancient Church, its mistress, because, blind and deaf, corrupted and bigoted, she refused to “wash and be clean,” when the accumulated errors of ages were plainly proved, and held up before her eyes.

Lord Sylvester left her for a time to herself, but he could not long deny himself the pleasure of inquiring into her sentiments, and the emotions excited by the glorious spectacle before her. It was not, however, possible for her to express, scarcely to define her feelings so immediately. They seemed like a weight on her mind ; she felt crushed and yet exalted by the immensity of what she beheld. She afterwards remarked how truly these words of a well-known author described what her own sensations had been on her first visit to St. Peters :—“The cupola is glorious, viewed in its design, its altitude, and its decoration ; it enchants the eye, it satisfies the taste, it expands the soul ! The very air seems to eat up all that is harsh or colossal, and to leave us nothing but the sublime to feast on—a sublime peculiar as the genius of the immortal architect, and comprehensible only on the spot.”

Lady Sylvester, however, wearied of the indulgence of these almost speechless raptures, proposed to take a regular survey of the church, and they then remarked that the side aisles appeared very insignificant compared with the middle one ; so that, in fact, they almost looked on them as passages to the different chapels.

“ Show me the tomb of the last of the Stuarts,” said Mercedes, as their conductor led them on, and they stopped before a monument hewn from the purest, the most colourless marble. A weeping angel guarded the tomb on either side ; they hung their graceful heads, hopelessly dejected. Were these the guardian angels who had been commissioned to watch over the fortunes of that princely family as long as a single scion of its race remained on earth ? If so, how many hours of anguish had they witnessed ; of woes that they might not relieve, and tears that they were not commissioned to dry ! Had they hovered over the repentant Mary in her lonely prison, and rejoiced over every remorseful sigh that she heaved ? Had they seen her lovely head upon the block, and borne her released soul on their wings to heaven ? Had they conducted the children of the saintly Charles to his bosom for the last time ? And had they hidden their faces in shame and sorrow at the guilt of succeeding generations, or with downcast eyes and burning blushes of indignation on their brow, watched, without attempting to avert, the avenging bolt of heaven ? And now, when justice was satisfied, were they there to shed

tears of pity, unmixed with any sterner feeling? Their extinguished torches, and those closed doors told that hope was expelled. No mighty efforts could bring back past grandeur; there was no strong arm to be raised for victory;—for the Stuarts' time was at an end!

Such were the thoughts awakened in Mercedes' mind as she gazed on this most affecting tribute to a fallen race. But she did not give them utterance; tears gathered slowly in her eyes, and at last she turned mournfully away, for her companions were in haste to proceed. They soon afterwards crossed the church to view that which, as a monument, is perhaps Canova's *capo d'opera*, the Rezzonico tomb. The superb representation of the most superb animal of the creation; the fervent piety expressed in the countenance of the kneeling pontiff, and denoted by the unaffected humility of his posture; the touching grace of the recumbent angel; all excite the warmest admiration. The sublime fails only where it should come forth in greatest majesty—in the figure of triumphant religion.

Mercedes was charmed beyond expression by the languid grace and pathetic loveliness of the reclining figure of the Angel of Death. As they walked away, she said to Lord Sylvester:

“That figure reminds me so strongly of a little German fable that I once read, and which perhaps Canova had read also. It represents the Angel of Death in company with all the ministering spirits

who are supposed to go to and fro upon the earth. He is lamenting that the melancholy office which is intrusted to him, renders him an object of hatred instead of love, among men; while, nevertheless, he is the instrument of the greatest blessing they receive. Think of the horrible and ghastly representation of him as the King of Terrors, that haunts the imagination of the vulgar, and of this lovely and, I hope, far more true personification of him that we have just seen. Is it not the same thought embodied?"

They did not in one visit exhaust nor even glance over the innumerable treasures of St. Peter's, nor do I intend to enumerate them. I would only wish, in these pages, to mention some of those matchless works that Rome contains, inconceivable to all who have not viewed them, and even then not to be conceived aright in the true amount of their grandeur and beauty by any who are ungifted with "that secret harmonious spirit," that is necessary to form an alliance between "the reader of a book, the spectator of a statue," and him who produced it. This I do, not with the presumptuous idea that I can pay a tribute worthy of them, but with the hope that by describing the sensations which they excited in the persons to whom this tale relates, I may make known their characters, their tastes, feelings, and sentiments, in a way that shall invest their future fortunes with some interest in the eyes of my readers, if any such there shall be.

On the present subject, suffice it now to say,

that our party quitted it with a ready concurrence in the sentiment of the traveller, who says that one of the chief causes of regret in departing from Rome, arises from the thought of never again entering St. Peter's.

On their return home, Lady Sylvester went in search of her son. She found him alone stretched on a sofa, and closing the door behind her, she advanced with a step and a look that seemed to alarm him, for he started up as she drew near. Addressing him in a voice of suppressed anger, she said :

"Do not suppose that I am not perfectly aware of the reason why you would not accompany us to-day. You were seeking apartments for the Annesly Marchmonts."

"Well, dear mother," said Arundel, attempting to laugh away her displeasure, "you would not have me backward in serving a friend?"

Without regarding his idle words, Lady Sylvester continued, with a fierceness very unlike the soft, becoming graciousness of manner for which she was remarkable in those more guarded hours, when "caution watched beside the lips of fraud:" "Have you dared to resolve to frustrate my plans?"

"Nothing can be farther from my intention," replied Arundel, with a coolness that was meant to make his mother feel that her violence was ridiculous. She looked at him with doubt and incredulity; after a moment's silence, she added :

"See that you abide by those words," and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

The fair fulfilment of his poesy,
When his young heart first yearned for sympathy.

COLERIDGE.

Sweetness, truth and every grace,
That time and use are wont to teach
The eye may in a moment reach,
And read distinctly on her face.

WALLER.

“DEAR Lady Sylvester,” said Mercedes, as she finished reading to her the letter from her father which the painter, Wilmot, had left at her door; “we must not neglect this *protégé* of my father’s. What can we do for him? Let me send him a card for your Friday evenings.”

“By all means, my love, if you wish it.”

“And when we go out to-day, why should we not visit his *studio*?”

“Just as you please, my dear; but Sylvester cannot come with us to-day,” replied Lady Sylvester.

Nevertheless, Mercedes, who had been greatly touched by her father’s letter, in which he reminded her of all that this young man’s mother had done for them, and the strict friendship that had so long existed between him and his father,

did not neglect to direct the servant to go to the Palazzetto ——, in which Wilmot had taken up his abode. On inquiring whether an English painter resided there, and in what part of the spacious building, the porter assured them, with an expressive shrug, that it was "*in cielo*," and it would cost them much pains to attain to it. Mercedes however was not easily to be discouraged when her heart was set on any object, and springing lightly from the carriage, she ran up the long flights of stone stairs with a rapidity which left Lady Sylvester far behind. At length she appeared to have reached the very top, and stopping at a door she paused, and looking round perceived that she had outstripped the breathless *lacché* who toiled after her in vain. Hearing his step behind her, she raised her hand and knocked at the door for admission. It was almost instantly unclosed, and it was the painter himself that opened it. She drew back abashed, for she saw him start apparently with surprise, and asked, not without blushes mantling on her cheek, if Mr. Wilmot was there.

"I am he," replied the young artist.

"And I," said Mercedes, "am Miss Ratcliffe."

Scarcely was this little explanation completed when Lady Sylvester reached them, and they entered together into the painter's studio. On the walls around were fastened innumerable sketches and designs: Roman women, with their pale, proud faces; fierce-looking men, that might have been heroes, and were only brigands; merry, play-

ful children with the warm complexions of the south, and laughing eyes that boded uncontrollable mischief. There seemed to Mercedes to be in every thing that came from the young painter's hand a deep feeling and sentiment, that imparted interest to the merest sketch, and his countenance beamed with satisfaction as he saw how his meaning was always understood and appreciated by her. At last, they approached the easel from which he had risen. He would have removed the painting which was upon it, saying :

"It is only a trifling thought that just occurred to me, and which I may execute in some day to come."

"Oh, leave it !" exclaimed Mercedes ; "perhaps if we see it now, we may offer some valuable suggestion," and she drew near with a smile.

"It is from the opening of the first book of Dante," said Julian in explanation. "Do you remember the supplication of Beatrice to Virgil to go to the assistance of her lover? After all she has said, as she departs, she feels as if she had not yet been earnest enough, and she turns back her head to cast on him one more look of the utmost entreaty. The shadowy form of Virgil," he continued, "is not meant to be the chief object of interest ; but this idea of Beatrice is quite inadequate to tell my conception of her, both as to beauty and expression ;" and taking up his pencil as he spoke, he effaced in a moment a face which, for pathos and loveliness, had spoken to the heart of Mercedes.

"Oh !" she exclaimed, in a voice of indignant

regret, "what have you done? Rather than destroy what had so much beauty, you might have given it to those who would have valued it;" and she looked up reproachfully, but Julian only smiled, and laid down the brush with which he had perpetrated the offence.

The ladies now prepared to depart, but not without Mercedes reminding Lady Sylvester of the invitation which she had asked for Wilmot. The young painter bowed gratefully. He had, indeed, on his arrival in Rome formed a plan of the most entire seclusion and strictest devotion to his studies; but now, he no sooner heard these words from Lady Sylvester's lips, than he looked forward to the day on which he might avail himself of the privilege they conferred, with the utmost eagerness.

Though they desired to cause him no farther interruption, he attended them to their carriage, and remounted the stairs slowly and pensively. As he re-entered his now solitary chamber, it seemed to him as if the light of heaven had suddenly been excluded from it, and all was immersed in profound gloom. He approached his easel thoughtfully, and seating himself at it, took up the sketch of Beatrice; he continued to work apparently entirely engrossed in his labour. He did not move till the shades of evening closed around him; and then rising slowly, and moving to a distance, surveying his work as he retreated, he exclaimed with a sigh of dissatisfaction :

“Oh ! how unworthy a representation of so much beauty !”

Repeatedly in the course of the evening would he start up, and throwing aside the book which he was endeavouring to read, he would return to gaze on his painting, surveying it in every possible light, now closely scrutinizing it, and then regarding it from a distance, and always quitting it with an air of discontent. Finally, he carried it with him to his chamber, and hung it on the wall where it could not fail to be the first thing to greet his eye in the morning, and then retired to rest.

CHAPTER VII.

In quella parte dov' Amor mi sprona !—
Sol una donna veggio, e 'l suo bel viso !

PETRARCA.

JULIAN looked forward to the day on which he was to see Mercedes again with anxiety ; but as nearly a week must elapse before it could arrive, he was forced, however unwillingly, to possess his mind with patience. Neglecting his usual studies, he wandered to every place where he thought he was likely to see her, but without success ; and returned daily more dejected, and dissatisfied with himself for the folly of which he was guilty.

Mercedes, in the meantime, had not forgotten him. So much had she been delighted by the productions of his genius, that, on her return home, she had mentioned them in the most enthusiastic terms of praise to Lord Sylvester, hoping to do an important service to the young painter by inducing him to visit him himself ; for she knew that this nobleman's love of the fine arts inclined him to be a liberal patron ; and his highly cultivated taste qualified him to be a judicious encourager of talent wherever he discovered it.

In compliance with the earnest requests of Mercedes, Lord Sylvester accordingly called one

morning on Wilmot, who on his return, for he was now usually absent, found his card. The first thought that occurred to him was an apprehension that Lord Sylvester might perhaps have been accompanied by his mother and Mercedes; and he flew down stairs to ascertain from the porter whether there was truth in this idea. The man however assured him that no one had inquired for him that day (for Julian was at present unknown and unsought) except the Milor Inglese whose card he had delivered. Relieved from his fears, and yet rather disappointed on finding them groundless, he slowly retraced his steps.

Nor was this the only anxiety awakened by Lord Sylvester's visit. Julian speedily came to a decision in his own mind, that the affection of the son was the link that united Lady Sylvester and Mercedes. Was it possible that any one could dwell with her, be constantly beside her, exposed to the fascination of her beauty, and still more powerful influence of her voice and manner, growing every day better acquainted with the charms of "the soul that looked from such a face," and remain indifferent? Could he hope or believe that to be possible? From that day he set down Lord Sylvester as the favoured, probably the accepted lover of Miss Ratcliffe; for if she did not favour him, would he have been there?

This conclusion, in spite of self-reproof, did not dispose his mind favourably towards Lord Sylvester.

Lord Sylvester, however, little aware of the dis-

turbance he had occasioned the object of his intended kindness returned again the following day, and met Wilmot at the door of his apartment about to quit it, who could do no less than offer to return with him. Lord Sylvester had a real desire to serve him in order to oblige Mr. Ratcliffe whose *protégé* he understood him to be, and also feeling pleased and interested by the fine intellectual countenance of the youthful painter, readily accepted his offer.

Julian, for his part, would gladly have heard it refused; he was as yet little habituated to the display of his works with a hope of profit; and this alone threw a kind of proud humility into his manner, while an additional embarrassment was imparted to it by the thoughts which he had allowed to fill his mind. Such, however, was the refinement of good breeding, the delicacy of perception, and the liberality of sentiment that always pervaded every word and action of Lord Sylvester, however trifling, that it was impossible that Julian should remain insensible to the charm of his manner. He found himself ere long engaged with him in a conversation full of interest; and when they parted, it was not without mutual expressions of interest and gratitude.

The following evening Julian went to Lady Sylvester's *soirée*. Impatience led him there at an early hour; yet he found the room crowded already with guests of all nations. Lady Sylvester was very much *pronée* by the fashionable world in Rome at that time.

Few of the annual festivities of the brief period

there allotted to amusement had commenced ; hers was one of the few *salons* yet open, and consequently all idlers eagerly flocked to it to see and to be seen, to reconnoitre and to speculate on the future prospects of the season. The assemblage there that night might have afforded ample scope for observation and amusement to any one who came with a less definite object than Julian. It was not unhonoured by the presence of a cardinal, nor ungraced by that of a fair ambassadress ; it was attended by the usual sprinkling of the inferior satellites of church and state, such as young *chargés d'affaires* to whose empty brains no one would have been sufficiently imprudent to commit any charge, save that of *public* affairs ; private secretaries of a rusty, mysterious, and inky appearance ; and Monsignori. Here was one looking so handsome, so interesting, so dignified, and so worthy to employ the pencil of a Titian to portray the mild benevolence of his full dark eye, the bland sweetness of his smile, the noble expanse of forehead, and the raven curls that fell gracefully around it ; how suitable appears his unpretending dress of black, with the floating length of silk that falls from his shoulders almost to his feet, and warns you of his approach by its gentle rustling. There you beheld another, whose whole demeanour is full of subtlety and meanness : how stealthy are all his movements, how insidious the expression of his countenance and the tone of his voice ! A third betrays, by the portly dimensions of his person, and the gross denseness of his faculties, his system of self-indulgence and uninterrupted

habits of indolence. Here too were sad and silent Italians who might have verified the assertions of Niebuhr, founded on observations made while he lived among them :—"The Italians are walking dead men : intellect and knowledge, any idea which makes the heart throb, all generous activity, is banished from among them ; all hope, all aspiration, all effort, even all cheerfulness, for I have never seen a more cheerless nation. They make a resident here quite sad ; no improvement is possible, so profound is their degradation ; total prostration without pain, and without the desire of anything better. There is no possibility of making any association of community of intellect and feeling with them. There is no object of knowledge, or of business to be the medium of intercourse."

But there were also many of their countrymen, (fortunately not belonging to the *haute noblesse*, for then their every faculty would have been numbed and paralysed), who were poets, antiquarians, painters, musicians ; who proved that the society of Romans can still furnish wit, intelligence, learning, and talent, and every quality that can impart brilliancy and interest to conversation. Among these were intermingled heavy Belgians, well-informed agreeable Germans, lively Frenchmen, and of course all the English in Rome to whom Lady Sylvester chose to accord invitations.

But for all that was around him, Julian had neither eyes nor ears, so anxious was he to discover Mercedes. She was not beside Lady Sylvester,

who received him graciously when he entered ; and he advanced with difficulty into an inner room in the belief that she must be there ; nor was he disappointed, for he immediately perceived her seated on a couch beside which Lord Sylvester was standing. The bitterness with which he viewed this sight, caused him at first to turn away ; but he quickly directed his gaze again to the object that so fascinated him ; and then he perceived that there was beside her one who was a stranger to him, many years younger than Lord Sylvester, and very much handsomer, on whom her attention was chiefly bestowed, and who addressed himself solely to her while Lord Sylvester seemed to observe them closely, but stood aloof in silence. The mild expression of Mercedes' face, 'so bland and beautiful,' which it had worn when first he beheld her, was changed as she listened to her companion to one of brilliant animation ; the colour had mounted on her cheek which was dimpled with smiles ; the ringlets of her dark-brown hair contrasted well with the snowy whiteness of the throat and neck on which they fell.

Julian, though not near enough to her to catch the accents of that voice, to him 'musical as is Apollo's lyre,' yet watched her moving lips, and strove to read the meaning of the words they uttered in the changing expressions of her eloquent countenance,

So unconcerned herself, and he so much !
What art is this, that with so little pains,
Transports him thus, and o'er his spirit reigns ?

WALLER.

Thus employed, he was almost unconscious where he was, when, casting an envious glance on him whom she addressed, he found that he had attracted his notice, which was expressed by a haughty stare. Julian turned aside in involuntary embarrassment, and moved to a distance.

"Surely," said Miss Ratcliffe looking after him, "that is Mr. Wilmot. I hope he knows some of these people," she added to Lord Sylvester, who, on this remark, quitted his post and went to seek him.

Julian at first felt an inclination at once to leave the room, and return to his own solitary chamber; but as he moved on, his progress was perpetually arrested by those he encountered; and feeling a hand placed on his shoulder, he turned, and perceived Lord Sylvester.

"Whither so fast, my good friend?" he said, kindly; "you are not tired of us yet surely. Are you become so devoted a student as to refuse to spare any time to relaxation? That is not wise; it was not so with painters of yore. If you live in solitude, you will make 'wit with musing weak, heart sick with thought.' It is in society that you will meet with such materials for improvement as are to be found in the study of a face like that.

L'occasion est belle ; il nous la faut chérir."

Julian started, for he thought this allusion must be made to Mercedes: but following the

direction of Lord Sylvester's eyes, he perceived that they rested on a beautiful woman, apparently English, lovely indeed but not Mercedes. Her complexion was of the most brilliant fairness, while on her cheek was a bloom too delicate not to be evanescent ; her pale golden hair was braided round her classic head ; her features were of the most faultless regularity ; but not even her large, deep blue eyes, could redeem her countenance from the charge of listless inanimation, and cold insensibility. It did not even possess the charm of placidity ; for the curl of her lip betrayed an ungentle temper, and haughty discontent lurked in the lines around her mouth. But as Julian observed the elegance of her symmetrical figure, her swan-like throat, her beautiful hands and arms, and the exquisite grace of every movement, he was forced to acknowledge that though her beauty could never have spoken to his heart as did that of Mercedes, still she well deserved the homage of the busy throng around her.

With some feeling of awakened curiosity, he began to scrutinize the crowd of her admirers. A lively Frenchman, whose toilette had been most sedulously *soignée*, and whose handsome person recompensed his labours, was buzzing near striving to engage her ear ; but she only rolled her blue eyes languidly upon him when he succeeded in his attempt. A silent Italian stood at a little distance, his large, dark, and melancholy eyes fixed immoveably upon her, with an expression of the

most fervent admiration. She only recognized his presence by occasionally varying her attitude for one of new grace. A countryman of his, who had unfortunately acquired all the frivolity of the Frenchman, but was without his *savoir faire*, and with all his *légèreté*, possessed little of his wit ; whose sole employment was to run over incessantly all the common-places on his country, (*il bel cielo, le belle arti, &c.*) which he thought would with foreigners suffice to hold the place of conversation, to every beautiful stranger to whom he could obtain an introduction, following this up by an offer of his opera box for the evening, and himself as a cicerone for the morning ; repeating with loud self-applause all the jests which he had already so often proffered to English ears, and after uttering a few unintelligible sounds, congratulating himself with the utmost complacency on the proficiency he was so fast acquiring in the language, was another claimant to her favour. She extended it to him so far as to allow him to perform every possible service for her that he was able to execute.

Near the lady was a Spanish noble, diminutive in person, but not without dignity. On his brow was stamped all the pride of Castile. He was a *preux chevalier* ; and his fiery spirit flashed from his glittering black eye. Brave as he was proud, and preferring honour to any other possession, he had sacrificed all in the cause he had espoused, and interested all those who could share

in his romantic generosity. But the sight of Mercedes seemed to free him from the thralldom of her beautiful countrywoman. Perhaps her dark and eloquent eyes, her almost colourless skin and peculiar style of beauty, revealed to him that a kindred blood was flowing in her veins. He approached Lady Sylvester, and begged to be presented to her lovely *protégée*. She smilingly acquiesced; and Julian, who became a still more narrow observer of the changing scene, saw to his surprise the young Englishman, who had hitherto maintained his post at Mercedes' side, relinquish it with an alacrity that showed anything but unwillingness, and place himself beside the lady we have described, by whom he was received with smiles such as had not yet been lavished on any who had approached her.

Julian witnessed such a proceeding with so much astonishment, that he looked around with a desire of finding some one that could gratify his curiosity by telling the names of some of the persons who had been the objects of his observations. Not far from him, he perceived a brother artist of the name of Raymond, with whom he had some acquaintance; one who had been long established in Rome, and who met with a ready reception in every *salon*. Wilmot approached him, and began a conversation in which he found that his friend was perfectly *au courant* of all that was going on around them, and quite as communicative as he could desire. In reply to the inquiry he made as

to the name of the lady who had attracted his attention, Raymond exclaimed :

“That lady ? Dear me, where have you concealed yourself since you have been in Rome ? From the light of day, I should think ! Not to know her does indeed argue yourself unknown. She is Mrs. Annesly Marchmont ; beautiful creature, indeed ; incomparable, is she not ? Only see her move ; there, now she turns her head. Look at her *contour* ; exquisite, is it not ? She did me the honour of sitting for her picture last year ; and this year, Macdonald is executing her bust. Her hands and her feet you may see in —’s studio ; the prettiest things he has there, in my opinion. The gentleman beside her, Lady Sylvester’s son, Mr. Wentworth ; (the present Viscount, you know of course, is not her son), he is to marry the great city heiress who travels with them, and who was found out on purpose for him. At least so say they who duly appreciate her Ladyship’s talents for those arrangements. Don’t you think that Miss Ratcliffe might remark rather too much devotion in his manner to the most formidable rival of her claims to supremacy in beauty that she will find ? There, that is Miss Ratcliffe yonder ; she does not seem to be thinking of her truant lover, but rather of the handsome Spaniard at her side, the Marques de Florida. All his estates are confiscated ! I dare say a few hundred thousand pounds would be acceptable to him ; and he would probably as soon live in merry England,

as dance attendance here on one whom he may call his sovereign if he please, but who, he must know full well, will never win or wear a crown. I am not sure that I approve Mr. Wentworth's taste in preferring the fair beauty to the darker one. See what feeling there is in her eye, and what intellect on her brow; and what an air of dignity combined with so much sweetness.—What! you do not agree with me? Well, numbers are at present on the side of her fair antagonist, certainly.”

Julian shrank from hearing another expatiate on the charms of Mercedes; and was not sorry to find his silence interpreted as difference of opinion. He moved as much away as he could from his loquacious companion, of whom he was weary; and turning his attention to Mercedes, strove to discover whether the absence of Mr. Wentworth, and his assiduity elsewhere, caused her a pang. He fancied that he could perceive her eyes not unfrequently directed to the spot on which he stood, and the animation of her manner diminished. Enough—the truth of Raymond's assertion was established, and he hastily sought to quit the room, for he felt a sensation of suffocation suddenly overpower him. Before he could effect his retreat, Lord Sylvester again sought, and again stopped him.

“We want you to go with us to-morrow to see some pictures for which we have a private order,” he said. “Be with us about twelve. If you can spare the time, I think you will not afterwards regret that you have done so.”

Julian thus taken by surprise, silently bowed his thanks and acquiescence, and departed.

And now the evening to which he had looked forward with so much desire, the prospect of which had made so many days hang so heavily on his hands, was over; and how had it passed? He had not even approached her; not even proffered to her the common forms of salutation; not even heard the melody of her voice, though only in accents addressed to others. Nor was this all; he had learned that her hand was engaged;—this he had anticipated;—but it was not even to him whom he had been constrained to allow worthy to possess it, but to one who appeared lightly to prize the treasure bestowed on him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Treading their path in sympathy, and linked
In social converse.
One spirit seldom failed to extend its sway
Over both minds.

WORDSWORTH.

IN spite of his recent disappointment, Julian, on opening his eyes the next morning, remembered with joy the engagement which was to bring him again into the presence of Mercedes, and thus proved the truth of the philosopher's assertion, that 'man's progress is not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope.' It was with a feeling of involuntary delight, that he observed, on his arrival at the Palazzo ——, that Wentworth did not appear among the party assembled. Mercedes held out her hand to him as he entered, and said with a manner full of cordiality :

"I never spoke to you last night, Mr. Wilmot. Was the crowd too formidable to permit you to reach me? I wanted to talk to you about a letter from my father that I received yesterday, in which he mentions you."

Equally surprised and delighted by her action, Julian eagerly took her proffered hand, but was almost too much agitated to comprehend her words,

and stammered in reply. Mercedes, struck by the timidity and embarrassment of his manner, redoubled her efforts to set him at ease by the frank kindness of her own. When they reached the gallery which was the object of their visit, Miss Ratcliffe missed no opportunity of seeking his opinions with the deference she believed them to deserve.

In the course of this morning Julian felt more deeply than before that the society of Mercedes did indeed possess a peculiar charm for him. Her love of his art had much of the same enthusiasm which marked his own devotion to it. In addition to this sympathy with his tastes, the sincere pleasure which it afforded Mercedes to obey to the utmost of her power, the request of her beloved father, inclined her from the first, to seek every possible means of benefiting Julian, and she resolved, by obtaining for him from Lady Sylvester a general admission to the house, to gain him as much notice among those who frequented it as possible, and above all, to seek to interest Lord Sylvester in his welfare. This last wish was speedily gratified; for from this day, Lord Sylvester bestowed on him far more of his attention than it was at all his habit to give to strangers; frequently sought him in his studio, and invited him to accompany them in their visits to scenes which he thought mutually interesting. The singular genius which Julian displayed, the passionate earnestness with which he pursued his object, the

melancholy which pervaded his thoughts and sentiments, and every expression of them, the pathetic turn which his imagination gave to things before indifferent, the intelligence and sensibility that beamed from his eye, and modulated every tone of his voice, and not less the timid reserve of his manner, that seemed to conceal from sight so much that was worth discovering, all these characteristics inspired Lord Sylvester and Mercedes with a lively interest in him from the time he became personally known to them. The thoughts and the heart of Mercedes, however, were by no means sufficiently disengaged to allow this feeling to reach, as perhaps it might otherwise have done, a dangerous height. Not so with the unhappy young painter; every day saw him more enslaved by the fascinations of his lovely patroness. He soon discovered that the talent she displayed in her attempts to exercise his art was by no means inconsiderable. The modest ardour with which she sought the opinions and advice of those who excelled in it, the interest with which she viewed the 'mighty monuments of vanished minds,' the natural taste that dictated her remarks, and the earnestness with which she pursued those occupations in which she found pleasure, all enhanced the charm with which her beauty and her manner had first invested her; and he was enabled, by affording her the instructions she coveted and so gratefully received, to live in the almost daily enjoyment of her dangerous society. This harmony of taste furnished them

also with a ready and never-failing topic of conversation whenever and wherever they met, which circumstance had the effect of relieving Julian from half the timidity which usually impeded his progress in intimacy, and sealed his lips in general society.

Lord Sylvester usually took a part in their conversations, and thus prevented their frequency from becoming either remarkable to others, or in any way embarrassing to themselves. From Lady Sylvester, Julian experienced neither neglect nor unkindness; she did not choose to offend a friend of Mr. Ratcliffe, and it was rather pleasing to her to play the part of a patroness. From Arundel alone he encountered dislike. The jealousy of Arundel's temper caused him to regard with displeasure all who won praise by any means whatever. This feeling was by no means confined to those who were peculiarly his rivals, excelling him in those arts in which he considered himself, and desired to be considered, excellent; in horsemanship and manly sports, in the favour of the ladies, or in the display of more brilliant wit, a more attractive person, or any of those superficial accomplishments in the possession of which he gloried. It was offence enough that they obtained distinction, be it how it might. The dislike which he had from the first felt towards Julian had many sources. At the root of all, perhaps, was the consciousness that, only in station was he his superior. The claims that Julian had to be received as a gentleman from his education, his

manners, his appearance, and also his birth, placed him on a footing that made him almost as obnoxious to Arundel as a more avowed rival.

The young artist, with his fine, intellectual countenance, and that pensive melancholy which tempered the fire of his eye, his acknowledged genius and deep enthusiasm, did not fail to awaken much interest. The silent manner in which he shrank from public notice rather than courting it, instead of disarming Arundel's animosity, only increased it; for the man of the world never feels his indignation excited by a rival more strongly than when he perceives that the very things that he so highly prizes, are lightly esteemed by him who, nevertheless, wins them. Added to this, the favour in which he stood with Lord Sylvester and Mercedes was another cause of dislike. Arundel, like most of the flattered and spoilt children of fashion, was often betrayed into the display of the most childish irritability; and it was enough for any person or any thing to have been the means of calling forth a rebuke or a reflection on his conduct, to render them ever afterwards an object of spite. Some of his invidious remarks on Julian had provoked replies both from his brother and from Mercedes, which, though they silenced him, only embittered his feelings more; but he soon discovered that Julian, though shy and unobtrusive in his usual deportment, knew well how to repel disrespect, and how to extort courtesy from the most impertinent possessors of rank and fashion. Having

made this discovery, Arundel ceased to be an aggressor, and sometimes he was not sorry to find that Wilmot provided Mercedes with occupations that prevented her from observing or resenting his continual absence. Mercedes one day said to Julian :

“ *Le voyageur en Italie est obligé de voir des palais et des églises*, so whenever you can spare time pray make a *giro* with us to some of those we ought first to see. I have not been to the Vatican yet. Do come and introduce me to it.”

Could Julian refuse? At the appointed hour he was waiting in the corridor, and pacing backwards and forwards in impatient anxiety to see the carriage draw up at the end of the colonnade. At length, it arrived. It contained only Lady Sylvester, Mercedes, and Lord Sylvester. Wentworth had not accompanied them; and again Julian's heart beat with pleasure on perceiving his absence.

Lord Sylvester offered his arm to his mother, and Mercedes followed Julian with a swiftness that soon forced him to leave them behind, or to be outstripped by her. When she reached the court, she paused awhile, panting from the rapidity with which she had ascended; then, again springing forward, she bounded up the steps, and leaning against the gate, which still separated her from the treasures she desired to behold, impatiently awaited her tardy followers. As soon as they entered, she whispered hurriedly to Julian :

“ Let us go at once to the Apollo and the Laocoon. I cannot stay here.”

“ We have still very far to go,” replied Julian

with a smile. They passed onward through the Gallery of Inscriptions, Julian saying as they did so: "When you have exhausted all beyond, you must pause here."

"Yes," answered Mercedes, "I will—but not to-day; not even to speak."

In consideration of Mercedes' wishes, Julian led them past the Gallery of the Nile, without turning aside to enter it, and up the steps to the magnificent Torso, whose claims to our respect are for ever established by the remembrance of the veneration paid to it before us, by one who is himself handed down to posterity as the possessor of a deathless fame.* They glanced at Meleager and his grizzly boar, and then issued out into the quadrangle in which is to be found the presiding deity of the place. Mercedes had now her wish, and stood in the presence of the Apollo.

Oh, glorious Apollo! will aught of human conception ever be more divine? How could more majesty be conceived? How could more beauty be expressed? Thou art Apollo!—thou art no other god! Oh, Phœbus! oh, resplendent light of day! How dazzling is thy glory! Thy visage is not cruel; yet is thy demeanour that of one prompt to avenge every wrong and every insult. Oh! foolish, misguided Marsyas, how benighted was thy intellect when thou declaredst thyself his rival! Oh! rash, unwise Agamemnon; how couldst thou dare to profane his altar, and expose thy hosts to his wrath? Well couldst thou, mighty Apollo, in

* Michael Angelo.

all the untried vigour of thy youth,* avenge thy mother's wrongs, disappoint her jealous rival, and slay the appalling instrument of her fury.

Mercedes lost in admiration of the inconceivable excellence of the work before her, so novel to her inexperienced eyes, could give no utterance to the thoughts suggested by the contemplation of it. She gazed on it in abstracted silence, and was deaf to the remarks of those around her; then moving as if in a dream, she slowly followed her companions into the adjoining portico, which contains the group of the Laocoon, in which expression is given to '*la pensée la plus tragique que jamais la sculpture ait consacrée.*' Julian observed that after she had looked on it for awhile, she turned pale, and shivered; nor was he surprised to see her thus alive to the terrors of it.

With what a vehemence of appeal, the appeal of terror and anguish, do the sons turn to the father, as if in him they had always hope; as if such was their confidence in the power of a parent to protect and succour, that they cannot believe that they shall now be left to perish without his consent being in some manner given to their cruel doom. In what an agony of excruciating pain does one of the children strive to extricate his crushed ancles from the dreadful coils of the serpent! Look at the repelling hands of the other wretched youth; did ever human limbs speak more

* Apollo was, I believe, three days old when he slew the serpent Python.

exquisite torment in their contortions ? In what an agony of excruciating pain does the father contract and lessen his writhing body ! And what more horrible than that the father, while his mangled children are beside him perishing, should by the calls of the flesh, by the sense of those tortures that will make themselves felt, that will crush and break up into a helpless mass the bruised body, and expel the spirit violently from its dismantled temple, be forced to turn his thoughts on himself when he should be thinking of them ; be forced to abandon them, to yield them no assistance ! How useless, how vain, how impotent their struggles ! The beholder gazes on the sufferers without hope, without expectation that Gods or men will set them free. A dull despair enters his heart. As he turns away, a conviction of the invincibleness of destiny weighs crushingly on his spirit. He feels in the presence of a hideous mystery ; an impenetrable gloom seems to pervade the very atmosphere around this group. Such must have been the emotions excited by the representations of those tragedies of the ancient poets, in which the remorseless fates and furies are represented as working their irresistible wills. The darkness of despair presides, hanging like the thick curtain of night, shutting out the mild effulgence of hope.

Julian, whose only desire was to gratify Mercedes, seeing how deeply she was affected by what she had already seen, proposed that they should leave the rest of the sculpture for another day,

and proceed to visit the pictures in the upper chambers; and as they acquiesced, he led the way thither. Supposing that she would be equally impatient as before to reach at once the chief object of attraction, he said:

“Let us pass on into the room which contains the Transfiguration.”

Mercedes, after greater expression of admiration than she had before found words to utter, remarked to the young painter:

“How inadequate, I may say how untrue, an idea of this magnificent picture has hitherto been conveyed to my mind by all copies, engravings, and studies from it that I have ever seen. I scarcely had any conception of the grandeur of the composition, none at all of the beauty of the colouring, and was wholly unacquainted with the fine character of the heads. I have so much more pleasure than I had anticipated.”

“Do you not feel the most lively interest,” said Julian, “in every individual of that afflicted group from the moment you cast your eyes on it? What tender parental affection can we perceive in the father who supports his child, and regards him with dismay. The very manner in which he handles him declares that he is his child, and expresses the exquisite tenderness of his feelings towards him. What anguish does the sight of his sufferings cause him! You can see the strong man trembling with emotion and horror; while in the mother, the course of nature seems reversed. She

endures her agony with a majestic calmness, assumed by her in order to infuse into her husband that composure under misfortune which leaves the mourner capable of making the greatest exertions, while invigorated by the hope of remedying the evil. How self-command strengthens and supports herself and others ! Look at that meek, melancholy countenance, so beautifully feminine ; she is the sister. Do you not perceive at once that her office is to soothe the maniac in his milder moods, when the fit is less strong upon him, and do not you believe that she has gained a gentle influence over him that no other possesses ? The apostles, meantime, are disheartened, are confounded, are grieved, are touched with compassion ; and these various emotions are to be discovered in their various attitudes and countenances."

Lord Sylvester, after pointing out and expatiating on the extraordinary merit and beauty of the upper group, remarked :

" I cannot at all join in the general condemnation of the union of two actions which probably were passing at the same moment, in the same picture. The mind has no difficulty in combining them ; though to have done so must have been, I confess, impossible to the outward vision. Still, I see nothing in this trifling anachronism that shocks the eye, and certainly nothing that is repugnant to the imagination. And now," continued Lord Sylvester, " we must not neglect to observe the opposite picture, the *chef-d'œuvre* of Domenichino. Is it not magnificent ?"

“Yes,” replied Julian, “it is magnificent, in execution and in composition, never surpassed perhaps in either ; but how inferior to its companion in poetry and imagination ! No tale is told that touches the heart or elevates it. The aged saint is an unpleasant exhibition of decayed mortality ; the other personages attract your attention principally by the richness of their garments. This kneeling figure in white is indeed graceful and beautiful.”

“And the angels,” added Lord Sylvester, “if not encumbered with so much clothing would be so. The lion is a majestic creature, and the landscape and back-ground are singularly beautiful.”

Mercedes showed that she felt with Julian that this picture was wanting in interest, by following him almost immediately to another, on which he was gazing with peculiar fondness, and he seemed to watch her approach with an eager desire to lead her to participate in his pleasure.

“This,” he said, as they stood before the *Madonna di Foligno*, “is a work of Raphael’s which in almost any other gallery would engross the whole of our interest. Even here we shall perhaps return to it with greater delight than to its more imposing companions of which the very vastness and the complicated interests naturally occasion us fatigue ; we shall willingly take refuge in this more simple and no less beautiful picture. Look up into the clouds, and behold one of Raphael’s loveliest virgins. One of his heavenly con-

ceptions of the Madonna, which make us feel that the imaginations of all other poets are mundane, and that they are incapable of infusing into the subject all which it is fitted to contain. The same may be said of the infant Jesus. It is not a mere child, beautiful in its innocence: it is the child Emanuel, and no other. And how fit to be his attendant is the angel beneath! What adoration in his countenance! What intensity of love speaks from his eyes! How admirable a contrast to so much loveliness, softness, and youth, is afforded by the bronzed visage and rugged aspect of the Baptist and the venerable appearance of the grey-haired old men around! How picturesque is the distant landscape in which the chief object is the favoured town, whose exemption from injury during a terrible and devastating tempest was recorded by this picture. There are still other works of Raphael closely resembling those of his master, Perugino; inferior indeed to those which were the final results of his own unbiassed taste and judgment, but full of beauties and well worthy to be observed. There is a fidelity to nature in every head which invests them with individuality in a singular and most interesting manner; a holy sanctity of expression, an earnestness of feeling, a fervour of devotion that is not to be found in the same measure, in any other pictures that I have ever seen, excepting also in those of Perugino himself, one of whose *capi di maestro* I must show you in the next room. There we shall also find some smaller works of Raphael,

which have afforded me extreme pleasure ; but perhaps you will scarcely share it."

With these words, he led them to the Resurrection, painted by Perugino. After they had readily acquiesced in the truth of the praises he had bestowed on that painter, Wilmot added :

"This picture, moreover, possesses an individual charm which I am sure will endear it to your memories. Do you see this sleeping soldier in the foreground? The youth, the singular beauty, nay more, the loveliness of the countenance, the perfect repose of the whole figure, the inaction of every limb ; these are admirable features in it, and it is well that you should remark these merits before you learn that peculiar one in which they are all swallowed up and forgotten, at least such was the effect on me when I first recognized in it the portrait of Raphael himself. And this other who is awake and flying in dismay from the scene of the miracle, is Perugino. Is there not something," said Julian, in a voice of emotion, and addressing himself peculiarly to Mercedes, "inexpressibly touching in the remembrance of the tender attachment which subsisted between the youthful scholar and the revered master, and the delicacy which marked the demonstrations they gave of the mutual feeling?"

Mercedes felt convinced more strongly than she could have been by any assurances, that at this moment Julian as earnestly desired to emulate his gratitude as his genius. She *knew* that he was thinking of her father.

"We shall presently see," replied Lord Sylvester, "a public testimony of the scholar's grateful love and reverence in those figures which he refused to obliterate because his master's hand had executed them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mercedes, "what work could have honoured his memory as that refusal did! But, Mr. Wilmot, you must not forget to show us those pictures which you mentioned, but doubted whether we should admire."

"Here is one of them," said Julian, with a smile. "Is it not true that some of the creations of fancy and the works of genius excite in us a more sudden pleasure, and win our admiration more than others do, without our being able to account for this power, or to praise them more, or to prove satisfactorily to those over whom they exercise it not, that they ought to be better loved; just as it is with some faces that possess an indescribable charm, 'than beauty dearer,' that never yields to any other superiority, however undeniably greater? Will you not allow that these representations of Faith, Hope and Charity are lovely? And this Annunciation, the middle compartment of this picture which is divided into three! The others are the Adoration of the Magi and the Presentation at the Temple, which I will not entreat you to admire. But see how pure and simple is the Virgin in her meditation, and how light, aerial, and buoyant with joy is the angel as he comes on his blessed mission. He scarcely seems to touch

the ground beneath him. How beautifully elegant is the architectural design which fills up the background !”

Just as they had ceased to examine the pictures we have enumerated, and before they could bestow even a glance on the many others which we have not, the Papal guards began to clear the apartments, and to dismiss the company. Mercedes departed with regret ; but still she felt that the lively interest which had been excited was followed by exhaustion, which demanded repose and engendered a mood of contemplative silence that has its own peculiar charm. She did not forget to thank Julian for the pleasure which she had derived from listening to his remarks, but she experienced a feeling of relief when Lord Sylvester took the young painter’s arm and proposed to accompany him home on foot, instead of entering the carriage.

She could not, however, leave the Piazza without being once more stimulated to admire. The evening was calm and serene, and the sky throughout the day had presented an unclouded beauty. At this hour, the Colonnade, the fountains and the Obelisk were on one side burnished by the unfaded glow of the rays of the setting sun ; and on the other, glittered with the cold, silvery stream of light that the rising moon emitted. Mercedes gazed on this strange and lovely spectacle as long as it was before her eyes, and then sank back to indulge in a delicious reverie, to which Lady Sylvester offered no interruption, for she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

Altra non veggio mai, nè veder bramo,
Nè 'l nome d'altra ne' sospir miei chiamo.

PETRARCA.

THE summons of which Lord Sylvester was the bearer to Julian, to attend Mercedes and his mother in their peregrinations in the Eternal City, became more and more frequent. His presence seemed by all of them to be considered indispensable, and Julian continued to obey, but it was with no untroubled mind that he did so. The very frankness with which Mercedes invited him to join her on all occasions, and the undisguised pleasure with which she always welcomed him, instead of giving him any satisfaction, were but so many cruel wounds to his heart, as they were but so many proofs of the entire indifference of her own.

Sometimes, on returning home he would passionately declare, as he recalled all the trifling occurrences of the day they had passed together, that were she to detect the love he so cautiously concealed, and indignantly forbid him again to approach her, shedding perhaps at the same moment one tear of pity to soften, though not to cancel the rigid decree, such conduct would cause him less bitterness of feeling than her present un-

heeding kindness. He generally returned, however, to the conviction, that to be permitted to be near her and to behold her, even though silent and forgotten, was far more endurable than absence. At times he would even so far fancy himself happy as to rejoice in his freedom of intercourse with her, grateful for the interest which she felt in him, and satisfied to possess the friendship which she did not hesitate to express with a warmth of which he had no reason to doubt the sincerity.

Sometimes, it is true, his mind misgave him; his wilful blindness could not render him wholly insensible to the dangerous folly of thus continuing to seek the very cause of the malady that consumed him. He could not turn a deaf ear to the rebukes of conscience; but when 'severer reason formed far other views' than those wild ones with which his fancy solaced his pain, he would seek to justify himself in her sight, by pleading that any proceeding contrary to the line of conduct he had adopted, would, in his situation, be so unaccountable, that it could not fail to awaken a suspicion of the hidden cause, and thus at once precipitate him into those difficulties which he had most to fear. If reason still appeared unsatisfied, he would silence her farther expostulations by a peremptory assertion that the devotion which he paid to Mercedes was, in its open demonstrations, no more than what he owed to her father; that to neglect to perform every trifling service for her that she asked at the expense of his time, and, (though she knew it not,)

of his peace of mind, was to shield himself from danger, only by being guilty of ingratitude. In short, it was nothing more than his duty not to let a day pass without seeing her, and to occupy his thoughts in attempting to anticipate her wishes, and his time in seeking to fulfil them. The hours which for this purpose he borrowed from those he had hitherto allotted to his studies, he strove to repay by stealing them from his rest, and the earliest beams of the sun found him at his easel, pale, perhaps, and fatigued by the vigils of the preceding night. With such specious arguments as these he replied to reason; and silenced, not convinced, she could only hide her face and blush.

Such an unsatisfactory conference it was that occupied his mind one day as he walked along the Corso on his way to the palazzo, to keep a promise he had made to Miss Ratcliffe to accompany her to the Corsini Gallery. There were many others of the party; but, as was their custom, Lord Sylvester and Mercedes bestowed their attention principally on the young painter, whose opinions they sought to elicit. The pleasure which they derived from their visit to this extensive and beautiful gallery, was not inferior to what they had promised themselves. The *Ecce Homo*, too painful to be contemplated with satisfaction, the beautiful landscapes, the excellent portraits, among others Titian's Philip II., the 'salvage beasts' of Rubens, and many other well-known pictures detained them long.

"I must," said Mercedes, pausing before a St.

Sebastian, by Rubens, "have seen at least a hundred paintings of this subject since I have been in Italy, and yet I do not remember one so affecting as this is;" and she gazed on it not without emotion: there was no one very near her excepting Julian, who, contemplating it also, said in a low voice:

"It is the introduction of these ministering angels that renders this picture so touching. Behold this one who is striving to slacken the cords round his ancles, so that they may not cut the bone. With what exquisite tenderness does another seek to extricate the arrow from his side, without widening the wound, or causing a fresh throb of agony! And may not this lovely vision be only the representation of an unseen truth? Is it not probable that invisible spirits hover around the martyr in his hour of pain, and minister to the servants even as they ministered to the Master when they brought him food in the desert? Do not they also need sustenance? Is there any thought more replete with consolation than this: that our griefs and agonies are not exposed to the eyes of men only, from which we would so gladly escape. Even our joys and pleasures may be enhanced by the same belief. The idea that there are purer and higher beings ascending up to God himself, who behold the inmost feelings of our hearts, and sympathize with them, may lend support in the bitterest hour, and impart additional ecstacy to the happiest!"

Julian stopped, dismayed at the length and nature of the rhapsody in which he had indulged. Thus when with kindred spirits would the timidity and reserve inherent in his character be for awhile forgotten, and he would at such times pour forth thoughts and sentiments almost too solemn for utterance.

Mercedes listened in silent emotion ; at length she moved on, slowly. When next she stopped, it was before Guido's well-known picture of Herodias's Daughter, and she said,

"I cannot admire that picture very much in any respect ; but I think that the countenance exactly represents our ideas of her, unless indeed we think of her as a child. It is a face of so much beauty, and of so little interest. What do you think of it ?"

"I agree with you in thinking the conception of the character very good ; but I do not admire the painting, nor the arrangement of the picture. There is a great deal of beauty in the countenance, and also an expression of absolute imbecility. We should remember in looking at this, that we are never led to suppose that the daughter of Herodias was actuated by any passion in making her barbarous request. *She* felt neither hatred nor anger. If Herodias herself were represented, it would be proper to portray her with a countenance convulsed with contending passions and full of malignancy. Here, there is no ferocity to terrify us ; but there is a heartlessness that disgusts. I

am glad that he has not infused any intellect into that face. A combination of great mental power and great wickedness would be fiendish."

Lady Sylvester was so much charmed with a Madonna of Carlo Maratti, that she called to Mercedes to come and see it.

"How very pretty!" exclaimed Miss Ratcliffe, as soon as she looked at it. It is a picture of the Virgin reading. The face is one of extreme beauty, much less fair than painters generally represent her; the hair being of a dark brown, and the complexion warm and glowing. The dress is brown also, and gracefully folded over the head and falling on the shoulders; the back-ground represents a curtain drawn aside, and a view of a distant landscape; simplicity and repose reign throughout the picture.

Julian remained beside Mercedes till the rest of the party had advanced, and then said:

"You have applied the very term to it; it is very pretty. It is wholly destitute of the sublimity and the ideality which I think ought to enter into this subject. It is a picture of a beautiful maiden enjoying all the peace of innocence; but if it be Mary, let us at least suppose it to be Mary before the Annunciation; for that face does not express a heart filled with those high thoughts which made the meek and lowly Virgin declare that henceforth 'all generations should call her blessed.'"

"Ah!" replied Mercedes, "I think that none but Raphael has ever expressed what you describe.

I wish that you would make the attempt yourself."

On entering a smaller room, they found it filled with portraits, many of which were excellent; and the productions of Titian, Vandyke, and others equally celebrated.

"How plainly," said Lord Sylvester, as he examined them, "you can read the character of the Romish church in its palmy days, in the portraits of its noble and most distinguished prelates. How rarely do you find one that really represents anything but a magnificent prince, a haughty warrior, a subtle statesman, or a lover of pleasure and the good things of this life. There is nothing of the apostolic character to be found in them. Their countenances often bear traces of cruelty and craft; they are often mocking and sarcastic; their dress is luxurious, and frequently their persons are effeminate."

"Here is one who is not effeminate," said Lady Sylvester, who caught his last words, and stopped before the portrait of a cardinal. He was singularly handsome; his piercing black eyes were full of intellect, and threatened to look quite through the deeds of men.

"No," replied Lord Sylvester, "certainly not; that bushy black beard alone will exempt him from that charge; but you will find it difficult to shield him from some of the other epithets that I made use of. But we must proceed, at least if you still wish to carry into effect your intention of

entering the garden, which will quite reward you for the exertion of so doing. The view of Rome from the Janiculum is one of the best, I think."

Lady Sylvester expressed her willingness to comply with this proposal; and Mercedes, though she felt that the pleasure which the gallery could have afforded 'was not half exhausted, followed without expostulation.

CHAPTER X.

Can you not see, or will you not observe
The strangeness of his altered countenance ?
How insolent he is become of late ?

SHAKSPEARE.

“INDEED, my dear Arundel,” exclaimed Lady Sylvester, “you seem exceedingly out of humour this morning. You have contradicted every remark I have made, although they were all very commonplace, really mere truisms. You have disarranged all the plans that I had formed, and yet proposed no better instead. If we were in England, you might lay all your faults on the climate and trust to be forgiven. But here the sun shines too brightly for you to find any excuse.”

“I am out of sorts, I confess,” replied Arundel, walking to the open window, and leaning out of it, cruelly twisting in his fingers as he spoke, a rose-coloured billet, scented with rich perfumes, which he finally tore into very minute pieces, and dropped them one by one into the street beneath, seeming to be actuated by a feeling of spite even towards the pretty embossed rose buds, and the delicate characters thereon inscribed; “but I would not avail myself of your excuse even if it existed. *‘Mon humeur ne dépend guère du temps. J’ai*

mon brouillard et mon beau temps au-dedans de moi. Le bien et le mal de mes affaires mêmes y font peu,’ as I read in some French book of Miss Ratcliffe’s yesterday.”

“Well,” said Lady Sylvester with some impatience, “I hope the fog that just now obscures your intellects is not very dense, for it is about your own affairs that I wish to consult you, and I have been waiting for an opportunity to speak seriously to you. It is true that I have undertaken the management of them ; but I cannot and will not any longer dispense with your aid. Be assured that you are greatly mistaken if you imagine that Mercedes Ratcliffe is a woman that will submit to the indignity of neglect. She is very young and very inexperienced, it is true ; and I have possessed her mind very strongly with the idea that you really love her. But, though she is unsuspecting, she is also singularly intelligent ; and if once undeceived, you will find the task of blinding her again far beyond your power. How ungrateful and how unreasonable you are. ‘*Tu fais l’indifférent et le dégoûté dans la bonne fortune.*’ You will provoke me to leave you to your fate, and to suffer you to drag on a weary existence on a miserable pittance ; a younger brother’s scanty provision.”

“Ah, there it is !” yawned Arundel. “Why was I a younger brother ? There is Sylvester, now, would be just as happy if his income were hundreds instead of thousands—far happier, indeed ;

for then his conscience, instead of preaching to him the duty of dwelling among his own people, serving his country, et cetera, would allow him to remain here, to study the fine arts and cultivate his taste; to wander from churches to picture galleries, and from palaces to ruins. Ah, mother! you should have done better."

"Believe me, my dear Arundel, I did the best that I could," replied Lady Sylvester, with great composure, "and what I had I gave you. You have my fortune, such as it was! and my discretion, and my skill, are likewise at your command if you so desire. What can you expect more than I have provided for you? Mercedes is beautiful, young, rich, amiable, generous, affectionate."

"Mother," said Arundel, interrupting her, and drawing himself up haughtily, "how can the blood that flows in your veins and mine, brook an alliance with a citizen's daughter?"

"This is a suggestion of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's," replied Lady Sylvester colouring with anger.

"If you remember," returned Arundel, drily, "it is an objection that I urged even before I left England."

"One that I have heard you mention, I allow, but never urge until now. Nevertheless, if it be insuperable, I have no more to say. Make your own decision; but let a decision be made. I will not continue to lay a thousand plans to submit to

a thousand annoyances; to administer daily food and flattery to the folly and vanity of such a child as this girl is, if you, by your indolence, ill-humour, caprice, or for some secret design of your own," and Lady Sylvester's eyes flashed with anger, "undo all that I effect, and render void those means which, aided merely by passive acquiescence on your part, could not fail to answer my purpose."

"Nay mother," replied Arundel, with a sneer, "if all these exertions enable you only to spend Miss Ratcliffe's money with impunity, as you have hitherto done, I think you might consider them sufficiently recompensed."

"Let this most odious conversation cease!" exclaimed his mother, rising angrily, as if to depart. "I only desire to know whether you will or will not accompany us to Tivoli, in order then to determine what my future line of conduct shall be."

"Dear mother, you must stay with me a little longer," cried Arundel, suddenly changing his manner from one of provoking impertinence to one of playful fondness. "It is dangerous to leave me to myself, for—

Wayward, fickle is my mood,
Hovering betwixt bad and good;

and besides, I want to explain to you how and why it is quite impossible for me to accompany you to Tivoli on Thursday."

"And why impossible?" interrupted Lady Sylvester with astonishment.

"I have an engagement for that day which I cannot, with any decent show of civility, neglect to keep."

"This cannot be true, Arundel; you proposed Thursday yourself only yesterday, and, in consequence of your so doing, Mercedes and I invited several persons to join our party; and you cannot now refuse to go with us. This is too daring a solecism for even you to be guilty of. Act thus, and I will never make an effort in your favour with Mercedes again. I will not see myself and her so grossly insulted."

"Your anger pains me, really. Nevertheless, I cannot accompany you as you desire."

"What! Mrs. Annesly Marchmont has sent to command your attendance on that day? You have just destroyed a note from her. I saw you do so."

"The truth is, that I have *long* been engaged to go with her to Frescati, and now she writes to tell me that she has fixed her party for Thursday. Why will not another day do for you?"

"Really!" exclaimed Lady Sylvester, "this insolence is not to be endured. Am I to be her slave, as well as you? Begone, Sir, or let me go," and she walked towards the door, her beautiful features so disfigured by the angry passions which Arundel's conduct and remarks excited, that, had Mercedes then beheld her, she would have re-

garded with dismay and horror the woman whom she had accepted as a friend. Lady Sylvester paused almost imperceptibly before she left the room, expecting that Arundel, thus urged, would say something to prevent her departure. He, however, did not move from the sofa on which he had flung himself, nor did his countenance relax from its air of sulky defiance. Lady Sylvester opened the door, and closed it impatiently after her.

A few minutes afterwards, Arundel sprang up, and glancing at the clock, exclaiming, "She will be gone, I vow"—snatched up his hat, ran down the stairs, and was speedily in the boudoir of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont.

CHAPTER XI.

Lasso! che desiando

Vo quel ch' esser non puote in alcun modo,

E vivo di desir fuor di speranza.

PETRARCA.

Est-on juste sans être sensible, surtout en matière de bienfaits ?

AFTER this angry contest with her son, Lady Sylvester continued her operations, with respect to her projected party, without receiving any further open opposition from him. She was forced to remain ignorant of his proceedings, but was disposed to augur well from his silence. She believed that he had submitted to her desires, though with so much displeasure and repugnance, that, in revenge, he would not afford her the satisfaction of knowing that she had conquered, until he could no longer conceal it from her.

On the evening of the following day, their presence was requested at a *festa di ballo*, given by the —— Ambassadors. Mercedes entered the room leaning on Wentworth's arm, and his mother was tolerably satisfied when she saw him conduct her to dance. While Mercedes was thus engaged she perceived Julian, who had entered later, stationed not far from her. His eyes were directed towards her; and the moment that she met them, she

recognised him with a smile that summoned him to her side. She said, as he took the hand she extended to him, as he approached:

“We have made a party to go to Tivoli to-morrow, and you must come with us. How long it is since we have seen you. Where have you been? Very busily employed?”

The progress of the dance prevented her from waiting for his answer; but when returned to her place, she asked for his reply.

“You will come with us?” she said.

During the short interval intervening between her first utterance of the wish and its earnest reiteration, Julian had remembered that it was really out of his power to accede to Miss Ratcliffe’s request. He ought certainly to have rejoiced that accident thus aided him to keep the firm resolve he had made to avoid her dangerous presence (a resolve lately made, and put into practice); but there was more of regret than of joy in the tone of his voice as he replied. Perhaps this was out of deference to the conventional forms of good-breeding, which usually demand an expression of a feeling quite contrary to the real one of the breast. No, it was impossible. Julian was going to pack a picture and to send it to England. He could not neglect the opportunity afforded him of doing so, and it was one that would admit of no delay.

Mercedes looked disappointed, and she said that she was so; when, much to her surprise, and much more to Julian’s, Mr. Wentworth, with an air of the utmost kindness and good nature, exclaimed:

“Why not go to Tivoli the next day? If Wilmot cannot postpone his business, we can postpone our excursion. If you wish Wilmot to accompany us, you must by your commands defer the departure of his picture, or ours. Which will be most easy?”

Julian envied him too much the bright look of gratitude which this suggestion procured to acknowledge any towards him himself; he only pointed out the utter impropriety of such a proceeding. Mercedes paused thoughtfully; then, after a moment's silence, she turned again to Arundel and said:

“Do you think it would annoy Lady Sylvester to propose this plan to her?”

Wentworth, eager beyond all things to regain his liberty, and believing it now to be in his power to do so, assured her that it was ridiculous to suppose that it could make any difference to his mother, which day they fixed on.

“The party is yours,” he exclaimed. “Come, the dance is over; come and arrange it with her,” and he led her away, leaving Julian lost in utter astonishment.

When they reached Lady Sylvester, Mercedes, still leaning on Arundel's arm, raised her eyes to her friend's face, and with the utmost simplicity, told her request. Lady Sylvester, guessing at once the author of this proposition, directed a glance of fiery indignation towards her graceless son, by which however he was unharmed, for he had turned away his head to speak to some one near,

and would not look at her. Though it failed to reach him, it did not fall wholly without effect to the ground. Lord Sylvester was beside them, and catching this look, felt his curiosity not a little excited by these proceedings, and determined to solve the mysteries which seemed to exist. He soon perceived that Lady Sylvester's anger was not to be any further indulged at present. Perhaps it was that her Ladyship felt unauthorized to exert much control, as she allowed the whole expenses of the day to be defrayed by Mercedes' purse; an arrangement with which Lord Sylvester was not acquainted. She expressed some annoyance, and some disapprobation, but still in gentle terms, and asked the cause of her capricious movements.

"Oh!" said Mercedes, "it is not caprice. I wished Mr. Wilmot to go with us," turning to Lord Sylvester, as if here she expected his support; "and he cannot. And the very reason that keeps him here, makes me wish to remain also; for he has finished a picture, and is going to send it off to England to his father to-morrow, and we have never seen it. We might easily do so in the morning before he packs it, if we don't go to Tivoli. So now you know all my reasons; and, dearest Lady Sylvester, may I make such arrangements as I wish?"

These words extorted an assent from Lady Sylvester's lips which Mercedes could scarcely wait to hear, as she was entreated to return to the ball-

room by a partner who, during this discussion, had vainly urged his claims. She looked around for Julian, from whom she desired to obtain his permission to visit his studio. At length, she perceived him engaged in conversation with Lord Sylvester, and in spite of her companion's complaints that the dance was already nearly over, she bent their course imperceptibly towards them; and then stopping, said to Julian as she passed :

“ We are not going to-morrow, and I intend to come to see your picture. It is very strange that you should not have invited us to do so. May we come ?”

She moved on as she spoke, and the young painter, on recovering from the joyful surprise which her words had excited in him, observed that Lord Sylvester had fixed his eyes on him with an expression of the closest scrutiny. Mercedes, on returning to Lady Sylvester, found her more evidently displeased than when she left her. At no very great distance from them was Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, and at her side, Arundel Wentworth. He would undoubtedly have gladly removed to some part of the room in which he would have been out of the reach of their eyes; but probably the lady despised any victory without a public triumph, and chose to station herself where his homage should be displayed, especially to those whom it was designed to mortify. At this sight Lady Sylvester was so angry that she almost forgot to be prudent, and could with difficulty refrain

from pointing out to the artless girl beside her, the unworthy by-play in which she had been made to act a part, and to unveil to her the treachery which she had herself enabled her false lover to practice. It was, therefore, a relief to her when Lord Sylvester, reminding Mercedes of a promise to dance with him, led her away, and thus put it out of her power to give utterance to the indignation she felt. Mercedes perceived that Lord Sylvester looked more than commonly serious, and seemed even more than usually disposed to silence. As they walked on without speaking, she exclaimed :

“ Oh ! there is Mr. Wilmot going to leave the room. I hope that you have made him promise to show us his picture ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Lord Sylvester. “ He asked me to tell you that you might see it any time before noon.”

“ And you will accompany us, will you not ? ”

“ Certainly ; I wish very much to see it. I have no doubt that we shall admire it.”

“ I think that my changes in our projects ought to please every one.”

“ They ought to please Mr. Wilmot, certainly ; for to him they are very complimentary. Did they please my brother ? ” asked Lord Sylvester, drily.

Mercedes looked rather surprised, and not quite pleased, and then answered :

“ Yes, of course they did. It was his original proposal, not mine. In short,” she added impatiently, “ every body is pleased but you, I believe.

You, I confess, do not appear to be so ; and yet you are the very person who I imagined would best like what I had planned. Really you are very whimsical, which I never before discovered."

Lord Sylvester smiled. He was now considerably enlightened with regard to the mystery which occupied his attention. He continued :

" So Arundel proposed it, did he ? Since when has his passion for the fine arts acquired so much strength ?"

" I think he did so to oblige me," replied Mercedes in a low voice, a little piqued.

Lord Sylvester smiled again ; but though he was amused, he was both sorry and angry. Wentworth seemed at last roused by his mother's looks, or the reproaches of his conscience, or fears of the consequences, to break through the thralldom in which Mrs. Annesly Marchmont held him, and returning to Mercedes left her no more. Mrs. Annesly Marchmont rose to quit the room ; and in doing so, purposely passed close to where they were standing. In a voice of the utmost sweetness, at the same time fixing her large blue eyes, with a stare of cold impertinence on Mercedes' face, she murmured :

" Good night, Mr. Wentworth. Don't forget to-morrow "

Lady Sylvester bit her lip, colouring with anger ; but Mercedes very quietly raised her eyes to Arundel as the lady moved on, and said :

" What does she mean ? Have you engaged

yourself for to-morrow? I thought you were coming with us to see Mr. Wilmot's pictures."

"And so I am," returned Arundel with every appearance of frankness. "What o'clock do you go? Early, I suppose?"

"Yes, half past ten."

"I shall not forget," replied Arundel, in a tone of much devotion; while his brother, who heard the dialogue, turned away with a gesture of impatience, and something of an air of contempt.

CHAPTER XII.

Hail, young creative spirit, from whose mind
Teeming tumultuously with thoughts and things,
The flitting notion with strong power combined
Of fixing all those grand imaginings,
An intellectual world of wonder springs !

THE first thought that occurred to Julian the following morning on awaking from feverish and disturbed slumbers was that of the promised visit, and with that idea came a train of recollections and of anticipations. Those resolutions which had cost him struggles, long repeated, and of such bitterness, now seemed as completely overthrown and destroyed as though they had never been established. He was again reinstated in his former position, rendered if possible more dangerous by the brief period of absence that had intervened ; and yet what had occurred to shake the foundation of his firm resolves, to disprove the wisdom of his determinations, to render them less necessary than when first made ? Conscience briefly answered : nothing. He was afraid to interrogate her further, or he would have heard that every circumstance that had contributed to put to flight his wiser purposes, should in truth have tended to strengthen them.

In order to drive away these unpleasant cogitations, he began to prepare for the reception of his guests. He placed his picture in the most favourable light and surveyed it anew, but with diminished satisfaction; even those parts which he had regarded with most complacency, now excited little pleasure. He became every moment more and more unwilling to submit it to the gaze of Mercedes and the scrutiny of Lord Sylvester. He now deemed it wholly unworthy of the attention he had claimed for it, and regretted his decision to send it as a sample of his powers to those who had hailed the early dawnings of his abilities. Even less satisfied with his present train of thought than with that which had preceded it, Julian permitted his mind to wander back to the occurrences of the past evening. He retraced every accident, fondly recalled every word, smile, and gesture that he had noted; but was finally disquieted by the remembrance of the penetrating, observant look which he had encountered from Lord Sylvester's eye, and from which he had shrunk away abashed and alarmed. At this recollection his cheek burnt with shame and vexation; he execrated his folly and imprudence, and determined that he would increase his watchfulness over every look, every tone, every action. Should Lord Sylvester or any of Mercedes' friends discover his secret passion, he knew not whether they would most blame his presumption or despise his weakness. Should he betray it to herself, he could not endure to contemplate the

possibility of an occurrence which must wholly banish him from her society, deprive him of the pleasure of ever hearing himself addressed by her in terms of familiar kindness, and even probably render him an object of aversion where he had hitherto been distinguished by peculiar favour.

While Julian was thus skilfully tormenting himself, the appointed hour arrived, and with it the appointed guests, consisting of Lady Sylvester, Miss Ratcliffe, and the two brothers. Julian's first observations were, with some anxiety, directed to discover whether the ideas by which he had been so harassed had found any place in their thoughts. Lord Sylvester had discarded the more than common seriousness which had struck both Julian and Mercedes on the preceding evening; he seemed to share the lively interest which the latter expressed in the picture they were about to behold, and joined in the reproaches which she bestowed on the painter, in consequence of the intention which she had detected of dispatching it without submitting it to their view. Wentworth was full of good humour, and prepared to extend his approbation even to Julian. Lady Sylvester alone appeared uninterested and dissatisfied, being disposed to regard Wilmot with displeasure, knowing him to be the cause, however innocent, of the defeat which her plans had experienced; and this disposition towards him was probably strengthened by the consideration that he was the *protégé* of Lord Sylvester, whom in her heart she cordially disliked and feared.

Julian proceeded to display the work which was the object of their visit, and led them to the easel on which he had placed his picture. The subject of it was the celebrated view from the Janiculum Hill, and the Oak of Tasso, which no one omits to visit, occupied the foreground.

"I have chosen," said Julian, "as most likely to please those for whom it is intended, a subject of much local interest. I have wished to represent not only the beauty of the prospect, which is of itself quite sufficient to attract us to the spot, but also to recall the associations that make it peculiarly hallowed, and to pay a tribute of affection to the unhappy poet, who spent there many of those hours which he wished to devote to a solemn preparation for his death, which he knew to be so near. We learn that in the tranquil shelter of these convent walls," pointing to the church of St. Onofrio, which formed one of the objects portrayed, "he became dead to the desire of fame and the love of glory, and almost indifferent to the homage proffered to him. Tardy indeed it was, and inadequate to heal the wounds which past cruelty had so wantonly inflicted! But I cannot believe that his heart grew insensible to his early love, nor that the fair image of Leonora faded from his memory, nor that the bright colours in which his fancy first painted her became fainter and colder as he approached that land where all earthly distinctions should be levelled, and where the separations occasioned by them should have an end."

As he spoke, he pointed to the figures which filled the foreground of his picture, in which he had represented Tasso, sleeping beneath the tree which is still called by his name. His wild and haggard features were softened by a radiant expression of hope and joy diffused over his countenance, as if bright dreams blest him; and to show that they did so indeed, a faint and lovely vision of Leonora floated in the air before him. She was there as his guardian angel, and she proffered to him, not the frail and perishable crown with which his friends so eagerly invited him to bind his brow, but one that was immortal and to be worn in heaven. In her countenance there was a tender melancholy, for she had suffered with him; there was also a holy joy, for she saw that his sorrows were drawing fast to a close. Her attitude was that of earnest entreaty; for she was bent on winning his ear to hear her message, and his heart to accept the gift she bore.

Lord Sylvester and Mercedes were both touched by the conception of this picture. This flight of Julian's imagination, and the deep feeling with which he had executed it, charmed them much. It was many minutes before the latter could express the pleasure that she felt; then fearing that the artist would think her cold and insensible to his merits, she tried to speak and tell him how great was her admiration; still she found herself unable to give utterance to her sentiments in words, and it was only the eloquence of her countenance that spoke her meaning to Julian, who read in

the moisture of her dark eye how deeply she felt with him.

“I owe the idea which you approve,” said Julian, after they had looked at his picture for a time, “to a passage that I met with in Ossian, which struck me as beautiful when I read it. I should like to show it to you ; I ought to have it here, for I studied it while I painted.” And he looked round the room for the book. When he found it, it opened of itself at the passage he sought, and he placed it in Lord Sylvester’s hand, saying : “Pray read it aloud, though it is only partially applicable.”

“‘On Lena’s gloomy heath the voice of music died away. The unconstant blast blew hard ; the high oak shook its leaves around. Of Everallin were my thoughts, when in the light of beauty she came, her blue eyes rolling in tears ; she stood on a cloud before my eyes.’”

Mercedes remained gazing on the picture while Lord Sylvester read, and when he ceased, she said, after a short pause :

“I like the words, but I like your picture better.”

Julian smiled with pleasure at her remark, and then taking up the book again, he added :

“There are many passages in this volume which has gone through such reverses of fortune, once extolled as not inferior to Homer, now so despised that few will acknowledge that they can read it with pleasure, which I think would afford subjects of interest to a painter, and *that* I have been accustomed to consider as one of the tests of poetry. There really are many descriptions and epithets,

though perhaps too lavishly introduced, that at once suggest a picture, and I should like to show you some sketches by which I have illustrated such images as have struck my imagination."

"Pray do so," exclaimed Mercedes. "Not that I can be persuaded to read Ossian."

Julian reached down a portfolio and opening it, began to look within it for the drawings he had mentioned. It so happened that Lord Sylvester was nearest to him at that moment, and his eyes naturally fell on the leaves that the painter hastily turned over in his search. Whether it was that Julian perceived that they were thus employed, or whether any other cause of embarrassment suddenly sprung up, but he changed colour and closed the book more quickly than he had opened it; then turning to another part, he took out the drawings he wished to show them and placed them before them. One was a face young, beautiful, and radiant with joy; eyes, lips and dimpled cheeks alike beaming with excess of happiness. Underneath it was written: "Gladness rose, a light upon her face!"

Another was a stormy warrior, thus described by the poet: "Wrathful stood Swaran. He rolled his silent eyes. He threw his sword on earth; his shaggy brows waved dark above his gathered rage."

"Those 'silent eyes,'" said Lord Sylvester, "which you have made there so anything but silent would do for a representation of the speechless rage of Ajax, when Ulysses met him in Hades."

As it seemed quite uncertain to Lady Sylvester and

to Arundel when they should find Mercedes weary of examining the contents of Julian's portfolio, they united in reminding her that it was time to depart. Lord Sylvester also remembering that it was necessary that Julian should dispatch his picture, proposed to leave him to his avocation; as they withdrew, Mercedes cast back one more lingering look, and slowly and silently followed them. Julian was left alone in no very composed state of mind; and Arundel, the moment that he had seen his mother and Miss Ratcliffe back to the Palazzo, hurried away to join Mrs. Annesly Marchmont and her party.

CHAPTER XIII.

Why, Romeo, art thou mad ?

Not mad, but bound more than a madman is.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

Nè del volgo mi cal, nè di fortuna,

Nè di me molto, nè di cosa vile.

PETRARCA.

THE morning was one of most serene beauty ; the sun had scarcely yet risen, and had not half laid aside its waking glories when Lady Sylvester and her party issued from the Porta San Lorenzo, and as they left it behind them they turned to gaze back on its ruddy bastions, bur-nished with the glowing rays that beamed on them.

There were many interesting objects on their road to attract their attention and to furnish them with topics of conversation. But Mercedes always found that she naturally sank into silence whenever she entered on the wide expanse of the desolate Campagna ; when she gazed on the ruins that are scattered over it, the nameless tombs and demolished towers, and thought how forgotten are the inmates of the first, and how the strength of the latter is laid low, a meditative and melancholy mood would come over her, and disincline her to speak of the present.

At length they began slowly to mount the ascent that leads to Tivoli; the road wound gradually up the olive-covered hill. The grotesque shapes which the twisted stems of these trees assume in old age, their light and silvery foliage, the picturesque groups of peasantry that were to be seen beneath their boughs, young and beautiful women, erect and stately in deportment, bearing with an air of native dignity vessels of classic form on their heads; their garments almost invariably of blue and red, rich and vivid in their colouring, forcibly reminding the beholder of the figures that adorn the pictures and frescoes of the Italian painters; their glowing complexions and dark and glossy tresses, brilliantly relieved by the contrast of the snowy linen folded on their heads; all these circumstances attracted their observation and greatly enhanced the pleasure with which our wandering compatriots surveyed the lovely scene around them. They hastened through the wretched and dirty town with all possible speed. The gentlemen of the party vainly strove to silence the clamour of the vociferous guides, who flocked about them on every side, and selecting such of their humble description of steeds as they required, ordered them to their proper post. They thence proceeded to view the beautiful temple of Vesta, and descended the narrow and slippery path that leads to the Grotto of Neptune, deafened as they went by the thunders, and overwhelmed by the savage grandeur of the spectacle produced by this turmoil of waters.

And now the party, which was numerous, began to fall in some measure into the order in which the different members of it desired that it should be ranged. Julian stood aloof. In such an assemblage he knew that it was not for him to seek Mercedes' side to proffer the assistance she must need. Arundel, intent on banishing from her mind any suspicions that she might possibly entertain as to the manner in which he had spent the preceding day, sought Miss Ratcliffe with an ostentatious display of eagerness, and placed himself beside her with an air of decision that was designed to assert a conscious right to that station. Lord Sylvester, who never interfered with his brother's pretensions, whatever he might think of them, quietly took Wilmot's arm, and addressed his conversation to him as to one whose sentiments and feelings he wished to elicit, and was disposed to hear with attention. The eyes of his chosen companion however did not appear to be solely bent on the picturesque beauties of the scene, but frequently wandered towards Mercedes, watching every step of her foot, as if fearful of danger, while he seemed striving to catch the words that fell from her lips, though distance rendered her voice scarcely audible.

At length the party arrived at the artificial passage which has been formed for the river, and which may be entered and traversed by those who deem their heads strong enough to pursue a course unprotected by any barricade, along a pave-

ment, scarcely broad enough to admit of two persons walking abreast, in spite of the sensations caused by the sight and sound of the foaming, roaring, tumultuous motions of the imprisoned stream beneath, and the feeling as if a crushing weight were insecurely suspended overhead, which is produced by the loudly re-echoing stone vault. Mercedes and Arundel entered this passage carelessly and thoughtlessly, intending to issue at the other end. Others would probably have followed their example, but their progress was suddenly arrested. Mercedes had scarcely proceeded twenty yards when her head grew dizzy on beholding the boiling, rushing water at her feet; and bewildered by the reverberation from the walls that encompassed her, her strength and her senses failed her, and she fell in utter lifelessness from the narrow path on which she stood. Another moment would have seen her engulfed in the rapid stream and lost for ever; but Arundel caught her as she sank, and hastily retracing his steps, bore her back in safety to light and air.

If the general consternation and horror excited by this accident were indescribable, what was the violence of the emotion awakened in Julian's heart! He was at the time fortunately a little removed from the immediate scene of danger, and Lord Sylvester was with him. Scarcely did he begin to comprehend the nature of the occurrence which had taken place, when the anguish of his soul was pictured on his wild and ghastly countenance, and

his appearance, even in that moment of confusion, would have quickly attracted observation had not Lord Sylvester, unseen by others, grasped his arm firmly, and said with something of the sternness assumed to awe a madman :

“Calm yourself; she is safe now. You must control your emotion.”

Julian had self-possession enough to comprehend his words and obey his injunction. He did not therefore venture to follow him to the spot where Mercedes lay scarcely restored to her senses. From a distance at which he could plainly discern her form stretched on the ground and supported by Lady Sylvester, he continued to gaze anxiously on the group until he saw her rise, and leaning on Wentworth's arm, slowly advance on their onward path. Then passionately clasping his hands, he exclaimed :

“Oh, God ! that she should have been in danger, and that he should have saved her !”

What was his confusion, when on turning to follow them, he found his progress again arrested by Lord Sylvester, whose grave countenance told that these wild, incautious words had reached his ears and excited his disapprobation ! Julian walked by his side in silent confusion, at a loss how to speak, yet feeling that silence confessed humiliation. He had no doubt that his exclamation had been overheard ; that his secret had previously been known to his companion, his speech and action had declared. He felt that to pass over all

that had occurred without allusion or explanation, was to betray a guilty shame, an unmanly cowardice; a want of candour, springing from a dread of truth. The place which Lord Sylvester held in Mercedes' friendship, and the kind and generous treatment he had himself experienced from him, rendered Julian far from indifferent to his opinions, and most unwilling to forfeit his esteem. If any thing could retain it after this unfortunate and inadvertent betrayal of his hitherto carefully concealed passion, it must be a frank avowal of his weakness; if any thing could render him an object of leniency and compassion, it must be a confession of the anguish which past struggles had cost him. But as reflection realized the fact that secrecy was at an end, hopeless dismay overwhelmed him, and the more plainly he perceived that silence was impracticable, the more firmly sealed were his lips. So lost was he in meditating on how he might best address Lord Sylvester that he forgot that he was all the while beside him, and when he was the first to speak, started at the sound of his voice as if he had thought himself alone.

"That I heard the words you uttered, Mr. Wilmot, and that your secret is in my keeping I need not tell you. That I will keep it truly it is, I hope, equally unnecessary to assure you. But one question I am desirous to ask before we part to-day. Are you sufficiently disposed to accept of me for a friend to give me the privilege of speaking to you again without reserve on this delicate subject?"

There was so much conciliating kindness in the manner in which Lord Sylvester extended his hand to the painter as he finished speaking, that Julian, who, at the moment when he began to address him, had felt some emotions of rebellious pride as he thought how mad his passion would be deemed, and how derogatory to her who was the object of it, was now softened, and grasped it without hesitation.

With an effort to resume that calmness and self-command which he felt to be becoming, he prepared to answer Lord Sylvester; but suddenly overwhelmed by the contemplation of his situation, he stopped short as he was beginning to speak, and covered his face with his hands. He quickly recovered himself, however, and before Lord Sylvester could proffer a word of consolation or pity, he exclaimed :

“ I have had cause enough already to blush for my folly and my boldness, now I must blush for my weakness also. I am little skilled in dissimulation, my Lord; but an honest pride, a self-respect, above all, the deepest veneration for the unconscious object of a most presumptuous passion, all these causes had enabled me to draw a veil over feelings, not indulged, but irrepressible. The unforeseen agitation of a moment has torn this veil rudely aside, and displayed emotions never meant to meet the eye of any human being. Concealment from you is at an end; the friendly interest which you take in Miss Ratcliffe will probably lead

you to keep in remembrance the discovery which, so unfortunately for me, you have made. If in this point of view it distress you, dismiss it for ever from your mind, my Lord, nor fear that it will ever be so manifested as to cost Miss Ratcliffe a blush of indignation or perhaps a tear of pity. As for myself, my Lord, I thank you most heartily for the kind feelings your words have expressed; but here nothing can avail. Of what purpose is counsel to one who confesses himself not amenable to reason? Sympathy is undesired, and impossible; expostulation I fear that I should ill endure. I have no hopes to combat; I indulge in no delusion that ought to be destroyed. If I have awakened compassion in you, spare me any further allusion to this subject. For this day's madness, you cannot blame me more severely than I blame myself."

Julian had spoken at first with tolerable coolness; but as he continued, his agitation became uncontrollable, and Lord Sylvester saw, that however much he might desire to render his friendship of service to the young painter, who appeared to him greatly to need a calm and considerate adviser, this was not the time to force advice upon him. He therefore replied with a tranquillity of manner that assisted to restore Julian to composure:

"With regard to the occurrences of this day, Mr. Wilmot, do not reproach yourself unnecessarily. The most indifferent spectator might have displayed nearly as much emotion in such circum-

stances ; and as to the words you uttered, I believe that they reached no ears but mine, and to me they conveyed nothing absolutely new."

Julian regarded him with surprise, and increased dismay.

" Good God !" said he stopping short, and speaking in a voice of the deepest distress, " is this possible ? Have I more than once betrayed what I deemed so impenetrably secret ? "

His voice failed him. Lord Sylvester, much touched, laid his hand on his arm, and said kindly :

" Your alarm need not be heightened by my words. I will tell you all I know ; and first, I learnt this secret only when I was with you yesterday."

Julian changed colour, and replied :

" When you were with me yesterday there were also present those from whom it is most important to conceal the state of my feelings."

" But," answered Lord Sylvester, " I have no reason to believe that they shared in my discovery. You told me yourself all that I learnt ; but I did not observe that you made the same communication to them."

" What can you mean ? " asked Julian. " Spare me this raillery, if such it be."

" Do you remember," continued Lord Sylvester, " that you opened a certain portfolio while I was standing near you ? "

" Yes," replied Julian, with confusion.

" Perhaps you had forgotten the contents of it,

or you would have done so less unguardedly. My eye glanced over its leaves without restraint, for, at that time, I was not thinking of secrets. In short, I saw there more than one sketch of Miss Ratcliffe. Even that observation would not have opened my eyes, for her beauty might well impress itself on the memory of a painter ; but there was something in the rapid glance you bestowed on them, and in the emotion, even greater than the embarrassment, which the sight of them occasioned in you, that excited a suspicion in my mind, which, once awakened, was quickly corroborated and strengthened by the recollection of things past, and a closer observation of things present. You see what you have to guard against. If a suspicion be once aroused, there will be other eyes upon you that will watch you more narrowly than mine, and whose jealous glances will magnify all they discern, or fancy that they discern. Miss Ratcliffe's friends may also think it incumbent on them to warn her against her present unguarded expression of kindness and interest, on every occasion that interests you—"

"For heaven's sake, my Lord!" exclaimed Julian, "allow me to stop you. You are mistaking me indeed. Do not suppose me mad enough to act so as to incur such observations and provoke such treatment. Nothing short of so unwonted and so horrible an occurrence as that of to-day could bereave me of self-command. Never will I distress Miss Ratcliffe by the betrayal of my feelings, nor

am I so wholly destitute of self-respect as thus to expose myself to scorn and reprehension. But I am far from allowing that the most high-born of her suitors has a right to banish me from her presence. I, like him, may bask in the sunshine of her smiles. Fortune has formed a link between us by which I am authorized to seek her side, and none shall dispute my privilege to serve her."

Lord Sylvester did not make an immediate reply to this vehement declaration. After they had proceeded a few yards, he said deliberately :

"But as you do not appear, Mr. Wilmot, to consider yourself entitled to declare your passion openly, let me at least ask why you should desire thus to cherish it secretly? Would there not be superior wisdom in forsaking society so baneful to your happiness?"

"No," replied Julian impetuously; "it is true that I would perish rather than disclose my feelings at this moment. Nevertheless, I entertain no intention of discarding them, were such a proceeding possible, which it is not. My homage may not always be contemptible. I have not begun my career so inauspiciously, but that I may look forward to a time when fame shall attend on the name that is linked with mine in the memories of those to whom I shall make myself known."

"And for such an idle dream," interrupted Lord Sylvester, "are you, indeed, willing to sacrifice all the peace and happiness of your present life? Supposing that your works finally procure you an

undying fame, which I grant they may, will that place Mercedes in your reach, even if, long before that time, she is not torn from you by some one possessed of the present tangible advantages of rank and wealth?"

"Your arguments are true," replied Julian with deep emotion. "Nor is it such happiness that I seek or demand. Still believe me that if in order to be happy it be necessary to obliterate her image from my heart, I would refuse to be so. As little would I purchase repose by relinquishing my love, as a soldier would purchase safety by dishonour."

"I can scarcely prolong this conversation now," said Lord Sylvester, drily, "otherwise, it would not be difficult to prove that an adherence to duty in defiance of danger, has not much affinity with the obstinate indulgence of a passion that receives no sanction from reason. If you remember how much I am your senior in years, my opinions may weigh something with you, and, believe me, when you wish to consult them, you shall find me ready to communicate them; but let us not pursue this subject now." With these words, uttered with decision but without severity, Lord Sylvester quitted his young companion, and joined some others of the party; nor did he again seek to hold any particular conversation with him, though his manner, whenever he casually addressed him, was kind and encouraging; so as not to inspire any dread of having forfeited his friendship, or even incurred his displeasure.

Mercedes had received a shock in finding herself

on the brink of sudden death, that overpowered her faculties and rendered her silent and abstracted throughout the day. She was frequently agitated, even to tears, by the solemn reflections that forced their way into her mind, in spite of the distractions arising from the scene around her. Her absent looks confessed that her thoughts were elsewhere;—true, they were with her father. Her imagination pictured him in all the agony of woe which the loss of his child would have occasioned. When her eyes fell on Arundel, who quitted not her side, and she reflected how her life, and her parent's exemption from a grief that would infallibly have shortened his existence, and embittered every lingering hour of it, were owing to his exertions, she felt that he had now a claim to her affection, and her father's gratitude, that forbade denial to any wishes he might entertain. Julian, who did not dare to approach her, knowing that Lord Sylvester's eye was still upon him, fancied he could descry, but too plainly, on her eloquent countenance the ardent sense of obligation that she felt to her preserver.

The remainder of the day was uneventful. The customary giro was taken by our party, and the beauties which it presents at every turn were expatiated on; but as these encomiums were chiefly expressed in the same terms employed by the most commonly used guide books, and all remarks were made with due deference to the decisions of former visitors, we do not think it an indispensable part of our duty to record here the conversation of the day.

CHAPTER XIV.

How fine this tyrant
Can tickle where she wounds !

CYMBELINE.

Yet never could his heart command, though fain,
One deep, full wish to be no more in pain.

COLERIDGE.

THE effects of the alarming accident which had cast a gloom over the vivacity of the party at Tivoli, extended in their influence far beyond that day. Lady Sylvester would have played very false to her character for skill and discernment, had she failed to perceive, or neglected to turn to account, the various emotions which owed their birth, or their development to that event. The expression of the lively gratitude awakened in Mercedes' bosom towards her son, was she saw only restrained by timidity, and she found that even Arundel's heart had been touched by the imminent peril that had menaced a being so young and lovely. He manifested sufficient interest in her recovery from the shock she had sustained, to afford his mother an opportunity of pointing it out with the utmost delicacy, art, and caution, as a token of the existence of a sincere love. Nevertheless, Wentworth cooled again so rapidly, as to convince Lady Sylvester that he was still

resolved to remain unshackled by any acknowledged bonds.

Withheld from open declarations, the only game which she was at liberty to play, was that of representing by artful insinuations, that the ambiguities of her son's conduct sprung from complicated motives; each of which was demonstrative of his high sense of honour and delicacy of feeling, and therefore could only heighten the interest which Mercedes was disposed to feel in him. If he neglected, as he not unfrequently did, when within the sphere of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's more potent charms, to render her the homage which, at other times, he was the first to pay, Mercedes was led by obscure hints to suppose that his generous spirit revolted from an appearance of paying court to wealth; allusions were indirectly made to the reluctance with which he would ask her hand of her father, lest the great *millionnaire* should misconstrue the eagerness with which the demand was made; nor was she suffered to remain in ignorance of the aversion which his own haughty and aristocratic family naturally entertained to such a *mésalliance*. At times, Lady Sylvester would betray to her, as if involuntarily, the peculiar painfulness and embarrassment of her own situation. Might not Mr. Ratcliffe, idolising as he naturally did his lovely child, believe that she had eagerly sought to grasp so rich a prize for her son, who was but scantily provided for, and possibly suspect her of attempting to gain possession of it by stratagem? On the other hand, if regardless of

this insulting misconception, she yielded to her fond partiality for her young *protégée*, and to her desire to call her daughter—indignant reproach and censure would undoubtedly be lavished on her by her proud relatives, who would conceive themselves aggrieved by the alliance with a merchant's daughter.

Now Mercedes had a feeling of dignity that led her to expect something more than toleration from any family into which she should enter. Lady Sylvester, after hazarding this last suggestion, saw that she had raised a spirit of rebellion, and checking herself immediately, abstained from pushing this part of her preliminary acting far enough to alarm Mercedes' pride. But she could not discontinue all this dissimulation so long as her son was obstinately devoted to Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, and so long as she could not prevail on him to come to her assistance, and take some decided step. It was in vain that she forced him to listen to her harangues, and to assent to the justice of her reasonings; one glance from Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's blue eye, one word of ridicule from her scornful lip, one trifling act of coquetry performed by one so practised, sufficed to defeat her; and the hatred that sprung up between these warring politicians was as fierce as it could have been, had a personal rivalry existed between them, while Mercedes, the original, but always passive cause of all this bitterness was not unfrequently absolutely forgotten by both. Mrs. Annesly

Marchmont's imperturbable coolness gave her a decided advantage over her antagonist, who injured herself more than her enemy, by the biting sarcasms and the galling insinuations which she would utter ; to all of which her son listened with alternate anger and indifference, and took refuge from her violence in the society of one who received him with unfailing smiles.

The veil that was drawn over these subtle transactions was probably in some measure pierced by the discerning eye of Lord Sylvester, but the inexperienced Mercedes was wholly baffled by the skill employed to blind her. She detected none of their arts, nor could she read aright the mystery of which she felt, but did not see the existence. She began to find herself often unhappy, restless, dissatisfied, but without knowing why ; and she sought in the society and instructions of Julian, a solace for her uneasiness and an agreeable diversion from unpleasing meditation.

Could Julian, perceiving her unwillingness to dispense with his services, refuse to render them to her ? Impossible ! After his first involuntary confession of his passion to Lord Sylvester, his next encounter with him had been attended with sensations of dread, shame and embarrassment ; which were, however, quickly dispelled by the continued courtesy of that nobleman's manner towards him, and the warm interest which he still manifested. Julian, though at first inexpressibly relieved by this conduct, soon began to fear that these demon-

strations of friendliness might be designed to lead to open admonitions. He, therefore, carefully avoided any private discourse with him, and by the practice of the most rigid control of every word and action that passed in his presence, trusted to impress his kind monitor with a belief that the cool dictates of reason had conquered the first impetuous ardour which he had betrayed ; and that, sensible of the madness of cherishing the hopeless love which he had avowed, he now only sought his patron's daughter with that devoted gratitude which it was scarcely more than his duty to manifest.

By this guarded demeanour, the young painter succeeded in retaining possession of a post fraught with peril without being molested by remonstrances on the folly of thus facing it. Satisfied with having imposed silence on the only friend he possessed, who knew what counsels he needed and felt sufficient interest in him to have proffered them without fear of the risk of offending, Julian pursued the dangerous path he had chosen without further interruption. When not at Mercedes' side, she filled his thoughts ; and his fancy was in solitude employed in forming bright visions of the future, such as he had alluded to when speaking with Lord Sylvester, who had cut short his romantic anticipations by reverting to the existing reality.

CHAPTER XV.

Perch' io veggio (e mi spiace)
Che natural mia dote a me non vale,
Nè mi fa degno d' un sì raro sguardo,
Sforzomi, d' esser tale,
Qual all' alta speranza, si conface,
Ed al foco gentil ond' io tutt' ardo.

PETRARCA.

Amor mi manda quel dolce pensiero.

PETRARCA.

JULIAN was alone, and yet how little alone for he was with his art; that art which was to mould his life, to direct his actions, for they were all to be in subservience to it—to occupy all of time that should be allotted to him—to be the aim and end of thought and study—to embody his imaginations—to give utterance to his feelings—to bring relief to his swelling heart—to link him not only with his fellow-creatures generally, but especially to unite him in a sacred fraternity with every child of genius, with every heart that can sympathize with the passions he shall portray, with every mind that can comprehend the deep and hidden sentiments he shall reveal, and grasp the meaning of the tales he shall tell. This was not to be alone. It was to his passion for his art that Julian now owed almost the only happiness

that he possessed. The exercise of it dispelled the gloom of hours of despondency in which he felt oppressed not only by the general sense that "this world is inferior to the soul," and most unsatisfying; but more particularly by the dread, inspired by his present hopeless passion, that "his soul during her confinement in this prison of the body, was doomed by fate to undergo a severe penance:" that he had received a capacity to suffer, and not one to enjoy. In such hours he doubted whether happiness be a reality—a substance not a shadow; doubted whether all past belief in, and anticipation of it had been aught but self-delusions—sweet dreams from which it was bitter to awake! Then he would rise, and overcoming the repugnance to exertion which he felt stealing over him, numbing his faculties, would approach his easel and begin to paint. He scarcely ever failed to find himself rewarded for an effort, which none but those who have made a similar one will either conceive or appreciate, by tasting an ecstatic delight, increasing till its own strength produced a healthy fatigue,—not a morbid languor—that prepared him to enjoy repose. It was like food and nourishment, imparting new life and vigour to a drooping frame. Then came high aspirations, and inquiries of the silent, secret, future;

What shall I do to be for ever known,
And make the age to come my own?

and an eager panting for the time when he shall be able to give this question a satisfying answer ; when he shall be able to point to the works of his hand, the creations of his mind, and say : there is Immortality ! His heart throbbed—but did he so closely pursue excellence as to despise all that lured him from his onward path ? He was prepared

To scorn repose and live laborious days ;

but was he prepared to turn aside from

All that lay
Nets of roses in the way ?

The form of Mercedes rose before him ; her voice that often called him from solitude, her gentle mandates that summoned him to her side. The fondest dream in which Julian had ever indulged, was the hope that when he had won celebrity, his homage should impart it to her ; that her name should then be enshrined with his, for ever united so closely with it that no lips should pronounce the one, without the heart suggesting that of the other. He resolved that no weak indulgence in the empty pleasures of the present hour, should defer that one for which he looked for his only real happiness on earth.

While he thus thought of Mercedes as of “ a bright particular star,” no selfish passion called on her to come down and bless him. He was content to love her in silence and humility, until that time

should come when possibly *his* love would have power to confer that undying honour which rank and wealth have not to give. When do they, unless accompanied by better things, transmit a name to posterity to be revered, admired, cherished, and conned over? High birth, high station, and boundless riches fail to save their possessors from perishing quickly. Daughters of kings, and mothers of monarchs,

Madri d'imperatori e di gran regi,

have passed away, and their names are unrecorded. Beauty has indeed often enjoyed a fame that has been handed down to far-distant posterity; but it was because it had found a place in the verse of the poet, or on the canvass of the painter. Yes! it is the poet's love, the painter's worship, that lend it a charm that defies time and decay.

How many women as fair, as gracious, and as pure as Laura; how many as full of majesty and dignity as Beatrice; how many as high-born and beautiful as Leonora, have passed away and their place knoweth them not; because no Petrarch, no Dante, no Tasso, had loved them! And if "a poet's love is lovely," Julian would not consent to deem that of a painter less so.

While he painted, these quickly thronging thoughts would vaguely fill his mind, half suggesting deeper reflections, then suddenly escaping and leaving apparently no trace behind, changing like the bright and lovely visions of cloud-land. He

was thus musing rather than thinking, when he was startled from his reverie by a voice behind him—it was that of Lord Sylvester.

“Miss Ratcliffe has sent me to you,” he said, “she wishes to see you; she has, I believe, a proposition to make; one which I advise you to reject.”

“Why so, my Lord?” replied Julian with surprise. “I shall be little disposed to do so, unless you give me very cogent reasons for so ungracious a proceeding.”

“I do not know how you will be disposed until I see you put to the test; but I know very well how you ought to be disposed. If you do not act accordingly, I confess I shall be surprised at the weakness you will display.”

Julian felt a little piqued at this declaration on the part of Lord Sylvester. He continued painting in silence for a moment, and then said:

“Indeed! If the line of conduct I ought to pursue is so very evident, the doubt that your Lordship expresses as to my adoption of it is rather derogatory to me.”

“I distrust you much, I own,” returned Lord Sylvester.

“You are candid in avowing your want of confidence, my Lord,” replied Julian, colouring.

“I am. Would you wish me to cease to be so?”

“Certainly not,” answered Julian, hastily; and then added: “If you have now sufficiently grati-

fied the *passion pour mystifier* which I know you to possess, may I ask what this alarming proposition is to be ?”

“It is useless to ask me ; Miss Ratcliffe exacted a promise of secrecy before she despatched me. Go to her, and hear her explanation ; but do not forget my obscure hints which will soon be made intelligible to you. Farewell.”

Lord Sylvester departed, and Julian, abashed by the tone between raillery and serious admonition which he had employed, went to seek Miss Ratcliffe, not knowing what to fear, or to hope, or to expect.

CHAPTER XVI.

Io dico, e dissi, e dirò fin ch' io viva,
Che chi si trova in degno laccio preso,
Sebben di sè vede sua donna schiva,
E in tutto avversa al suo desio acceso ;
Sebbene amor d'ogni mercede il priva,
Poscia che 'l tempo e la fatica ha speso,
Pur ch' altamente abbia locato il cuore,
Pianger non de', sebben languisce e muore.

ARIOSTO.

MERCEDES looked up when Julian entered, and rewarded his prompt obedience to her commands by a smiling welcome. Lady Sylvester was writing in a recess at the end of the room, and Mercedes bid him come to the table at which she was seated, saying :—

“ *I sent for you, Mr. Wilmot, and now that you are come, you must listen patiently to what I have to say, or rather to read.*”

As she spoke, she unlocked a writing desk and drew out a letter, which she unfolded, and read aloud :

“ Do not forget, my dearest child, that you must not leave Rome without the fulfilment of the promise I exacted, that you should bring me back a portrait of your sweet face, of that mild look that brings your mother before me. Select what

painter you will. I also desire to have a bust of you, and let it be executed by ——. I hear that he will not generally undertake portraits; but, perhaps, as we were once acquainted, he will not refuse to do yours. I want these two things to adorn my new house, and I have so set my heart upon seeing them there, that, whatever else I may do, I shall still think it incomplete until they arrive.”

As Mercedes read these affectionate and partial expressions, tears filled her eyes though she tried to laugh them away, and blushing deeply as she spoke, with an embarrassment which evidently sprang from modesty alone, she said:—

“And now, Mr. Wilmot, I am going to ask you a great favour. I have never seen you execute a portrait, it is true, but your other works do more than assure you of success in such an attempt. I know that if my picture be the production of your hand, that circumstance alone will render it doubly valuable to my father. In short, may I ask you to undertake it?”

She paused and then added hastily :

“But I see that I have given you pain. You are either displeased or vexed at my proposal. Why so? Perhaps you think it derogatory to you to undertake a portrait. Forgive a request made in ignorance, and certainly not intended to annoy.”

Julian had, indeed, changed colour when her meaning first broke upon him; the whole room swam before his eyes; a sudden faintness over-

powered him ; but a sense of the danger he was running—a consciousness that his secret was trembling on his lips—above all, the fear that she would retract, which her last words awakened, recalled him to his senses, and he replied with all the calmness he could resume, and speaking slowly with an effort to hide the tremour of his voice :

“ Miss Ratcliffe, you do me far too much honour by such a request. Pardon me if a passing sensation of pain overcame me, and impeded an immediate expression of my sense of the favour you confer. I entreat you not to doubt my desire to dedicate whatever power I may have attained to the service of Mr. Ratcliffe, who has been so generously my patron. Yet allow me a little time for consideration before I promise to commence an undertaking in which I could not fail, without experiencing the greatest mortification and grief.”

Mercedes looked surprised at the tone of anxiety in which the young painter spoke ; and the gratitude which he evinced when he mentioned her father, touched her visibly ; but summoning a smile to her countenance, she answered quickly :

“ Indeed, we must not enter on this affair with so much solemnity. I have always been told that it is a formidable thing to sit for one’s portrait, and I shall certainly find it so, if you begin by being so alarmingly serious.”

Lady Sylvester now came forward, and throwing the letter she had finished on the table, said :

“Well, my dear Mercedes, if you and Mr. Wilmot have completed your important arrangements, I will order the carriage. Let us drive to the Villa Doria Pamfili. The weather is so enchantingly fine. Mr. Wilmot, will you like to accompany us? Arundel is gone out riding. Sylvester will be with us, I suppose, and he is always glad to have you.”

Julian cast an involuntary glance at Mercedes, to see whether her countenance seconded this invitation before he replied to it; but she evidently had not attended to Lady Sylvester's words, and turning from her with a blank feeling of disappointment, he muttered something about the impossibility of spending the rest of the day anywhere but in his studio. As he spoke, Lord Sylvester entered the room, and catching his last words, inquired the subject of discussion. As soon as he heard it, he said to Julian:

“I tell you what we will do. You and I, Wilmot, will start on foot, and we shall reach the Villa before the ladies will arrive. This plan will be far more conducive to your health than the constant confinement in which you delight; nor is it right to despise such a gift of nature as this lovely day.”

“Is the riding party large to-day?” said Mercedes, who was leaning from the open window; and she turned her head and fixed her eyes on Lord Sylvester as she asked the question.

“Very;” replied he, “I saw a grand *cortège*

at Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's door as I passed, and I arrived just in time to see that Arundel was the fortunate man who assisted her to mount."

Julian saw that Lord Sylvester directed a significant look towards his mother, as he spoke these concluding words. Without appearing to regard, or even to hear them, she left the room; and Wilmot, when he looked next at Mercedes, plainly perceived that the colour on her cheek was heightened, and she followed Lady Sylvester with an air of more loftiness than was at all habitual to her.

Julian was allowed no further time for considering these not insignificant circumstances, for Lord Sylvester taking his arm, led him from the room, and neither of them spoke again, more than a few unimportant words, until they were without the gates. Julian, hitherto, had neither positively believed nor disbelieved the intelligence which Raymond had given him touching the engagement of Mercedes' hand. Whenever the unpleasant recollection of his words entered his mind, he strove to banish it by indulging the fond idea that their assertion might easily be false. He had quite as frequently heard from others a similar declaration with regard to Lord Sylvester, and yet as to him, his mind was perfectly at ease. The avowed friendship that existed between him and Mercedes proved that love was unthought of. Besides, it was impossible that Lord Sylvester, professing so much regard for him as he did,

should intentionally conceal from him such a fact. Arundel's frequent absence from their circle had always given him satisfaction, and the idea that Mercedes was on the brink of attaining an insight into the cause of this singular behaviour filled his mind with tumultuous emotions of surprise, hope, and joy. The silence these feelings induced he would probably have maintained throughout their walk, had not the thread of his meditations been broken by Lord Sylvester, who speaking abruptly, said :

"Well, have you acceded to Miss Ratcliffe's request?"

The blood rushed up into Julian's brow and temples, as he felt the scrutinizing eye of his friend fixed on him ; he did not reply for a moment, and then he said with some indignation :

"Would you have me refuse to make the only return I can make for the favours of my benefactor?"

"Then you have accepted her offer?" continued Lord Sylvester, drily.

"No," replied Julian with some hesitation, "I have not given her an answer. I do not yet know that I can undertake this task. I fear that I am incompetent to succeed, and to fail here—"

"Nonsense," interrupted his friend, "you are perfectly equal to success ; but for such success you will have to pay a heavy price."

"You are mistaken. Your arguments are grounded on false premises, believe me," continued

Julian, with agitation. "The irrevocable past has for ever decided my fate, and the future has lost the power of working a change in me. There is little variability in me. Thoughts that enter my brain remain there; affections once conceived, possess my heart for ever. It is on this very characteristic of my nature that all my hopes of future success in my art are founded; you look unconvinced. You believe that the power of the will is irresistible. I know that such is your opinion. I have heard you say frequently: 'Il y a de ces volontés à qui rien ne résiste, parce qu'elles résistent à tout.' Even so be it; let me then openly confess that I never can, or shall *will* this change, the necessity of which you urge."

"Nay," replied Lord Sylvester, "if you are determined, 'wishing without hope to restlessly despair,' I have, of course, no more to say."

Julian kept silent for a time, and then said:

"I do not think that where hope was never looked for, despair will intrude. Despair is the successor of disappointment, but I have never been disappointed, nor do I look to be so: all that I ask I deem attainable. My sole desire is to earn fame for myself, which, when mine, I will confer upon her. Meantime, she shall never know that she possesses my homage, until it shall be a gift to be desired. This land of poets and of painters has afforded many instances of what I would accomplish. Leave me to tread in their footsteps."

Lord Sylvester scarcely knew whether he was most inclined to smile or to sigh at his friend's romantic design. He saw, however, that his passion would undoubtedly be a spur to his genius, and this hope disposed him to leniency. Still he would not allow his sophistry to pass uncombated ; so he resumed the conversation, saying :

“ You say that despair supposes the pre-existence of hope. Did Petrarch feel none of the anguish of despair, and yet what did he ever expect or hope?”

Julian blushed, for he saw that his monitor had a suspicion that in this poet he had discovered the object of his emulation. Julian did not absolutely fear ridicule ; at least his dread of it had no power to make him abandon any design, or modify the expression of any sentiment which he entertained ; it could not lessen his candour though it could increase his reserve ; he abhorred it still, and shrank from coming in contact with it. The supposition that he was now on the brink of exciting derision silenced him for a moment ; then discarding this sensation of shame, he boldly continued in reply :

“ Petrarch experienced both hope and disappointment. He saw Laura, for the first time, in ignorance that she belonged to another. At that instant he felt that they were formed to be united by every band of sympathy and love ; and he did not as yet perceive the barrier that must necessarily separate them, stretching as it did from one end of life to the other.

Too early seen unknown, and known too late !

Unhappy Petrarch! he had to *learn* that he had seen Laura too late. Had they sooner met, she might, she would have loved him; and he was not without a feeling that with her also this thought, at once so bitter and so sweet, must be present. Laura, like him, must at least have cast back one look on the past, meditating on how it might have been different."

"This fatal discovery introduced despair into his heart, but it only occasionally reigned there. Other and holier aspirations brought him peace; perhaps she came in a mournful, but certainly in a serene mood. And can you believe that he would have been willing to re-purchase the tranquillity of indifference, by resigning that subject of contemplation which her virtues afforded him, that theme of inspiration which he derived from her beauty and her excellence? Can you believe that, if at the close of his life he had been asked whether he would rather have enjoyed existence in insensibility to Laura's charms, or suffered it, as he did, with a heart and mind engrossed by them, he would have hesitated in his choice?"

"Consider what Petrarch owes to that passion, of which he wanted not friends to represent the madness and the folly. They viewed with pity and regret the shackles which held so noble a spirit in thralldom. What they regarded as the chains which bound him to earth, they should rather have called the pinions which bore him to heaven. It is true that Petrarch was one of the most erudite scholars of his age, the reviver of learning,

favoured by princes, honoured by all the great men, his contemporaries, who had any reputation for taste and knowledge.

“Ages have past and his reputation still lives ; thus the sanguine prognostications of his admiring friends are verified : but on what basis does his fame immoveably rest ? Not on his laborious works of learning and research ; not on that great effort of classic erudition, his Epic poem, which he himself contemplated with so much veneration and delight ; not on the elegant Latin Epistles with which he charmed the ears of all the scholars of Europe, and in which, I am sorry to add, he poured forth adulation to the great. I have often heard it lamented that justice is not rendered to him, because all these circumstances which I have enumerated are commonly past over and forgotten. What is it then that is not forgotten ? The spontaneous ebullitions of his intimate feelings ; the true picture of his own heart ; the passionate expression of real grief ; the touching confession of natural infirmity. It is when asking for sympathy rather than admiration, that he is sure to awaken a responsive echo. Thus will it ever be ! One faithful page from the history of the human heart possesses more interest for our fellow creatures than the most elaborate productions of art. Believe me, had Petrarch been persuaded to sacrifice his love, he would have forfeited his fame also.”

Julian paused, but he felt that he had more to say, and he saw that his friend was willing to listen.

“There is something most ennobling to the soul in all-enduring constancy such as his. Immutability is inherent in every thing great. Change may bring with it many advantages, yet as it is change, it is an evil. The heart should carefully guard against the admission of love for it, because it degrades its nature. The gifts it bestows may be valuable, but they are too dearly purchased if they teach us to become wavering and inconsistent. ‘Je tiens la fidélité pour la plus excellente chose de ce monde ; bonne pour autrui—meilleure pour soi.’* This assertion I once read and have never since forgotten. Belief in its truth is graven on my heart.”

Here Julian ceased, and Lord Sylvester for a while delayed to reply. He saw how little the sober reason of his remarks availed in turning away his friend from his rash pursuit. At length he said :

“You started with a demonstration that Petrarch’s case and yours were not parallel. Is your conduct then to be similar? Between Miss Ratcliffe and you, you acknowledge the existence of an insurmountable barrier ; to you it has been visible from the first :—you say that you have never deluded yourself with the idea that it was to be removed—”

“No, indeed,” interrupted Julian, speaking not without bitterness. “Wealth and station stand between us. To her it would be esteemed degradation to love me, though it shall be esteemed

* Peyronnet, *Pensées d’un Prisonnier*.

no degradation to be loved by me. Not that this formidable barrier will then be levelled: I do not look to earn those gifts of fortune in which my rivals are my superiors; and even if in time they were mine, she would then probably be another's."

Lord Sylvester, provoked as well as distressed by the pertinacity with which his friend clung to misery, was proceeding to expostulate further, when the carriage, which was following them, unexpectedly overtook them, and they accepted the invitation which they received to enter it.

Wilmot could not immediately divest himself of the embarrassment caused by the nature of the conversation, which the appearance of her who was the subject of it had alone suspended;—how it might otherwise have terminated he knew not. Perhaps his patron might finally have adopted his views, and consented to the execution of his present design without further remonstrance. But Julian knew that his arguments had not yet produced this desired effect, nor was he ignorant that the end of the conversation might possibly have found them estranged from each other perhaps for ever; that the pertinacity of the one, and the obduracy of the other, if declared without disguise, might have rendered any further interchange of friendliness impracticable. The longer he pursued these reflections with candour, the more clearly he perceived that from a prolonged debate, the first result, which would have afforded him so much happiness, was as little to be expected as the

second, which would have given him the severest pain, was greatly to be feared. This perception, though it led him to rejoice in the interruption which had taken place, could not restore him to a tranquil state of mind ; he knew not how to address Mercedes while Lord Sylvester's eye was upon him, and taking refuge in the silence which was too habitual to him, even in their society, to excite surprise, he became so engrossed by his own thoughts as to be deaf to the conversation, which they held. Nor was he roused from this abstraction until their arrival at the Villa recalled him from vague and painful anticipations of the future to a sense of the present. The loveliness of the scene around now demanded and obtained a share of his attention. The young painter's dejection had not been unnoticed by Mercedes, and she strove to win him from it by forcing him to remark with her the different beauties which so delighted her eyes. They paused to gaze back on St. Peter's majestic dome, with the elegant and varied outline of Soracte clearly discernible beyond.

Lord and Lady Sylvester had on their entrance met with a party of friends, but Miss Ratcliffe glancing at them, and perceiving that they were strangers to her, showed no disposition to join them ; and Julian found himself walking beside her over the green turf enamelled with anemones of every hue, with violets, iris, and orchis, and countless other bright flowers, which she perpetually stooped to pluck. At length they reached

a grove of pines, between the lofty stems of which a thousand beautiful vistas caught their eyes. Mercedes needed not to point out to the painter's observation the majesty of their towering forms, the picturesque character of their rough indented bark, the richness of its ruddy colour, the variety of outline caused by the circumstance of the branches so frequently breaking off near the parent stem, and the gorgeous verdure of their noble heads, illuminated as they were by the golden sun of their country. As they walked to and fro in the stately avenues in which the trees were ranged, Mercedes exclaimed :

“Do you think that Portia's Villa at Belmont, was such an one as this? Do you think that it was on such a bank as the one yonder that the moonlight slept so sweetly? Do you think that it was in an alcove similar to one of those which adorn this garden that she placed the caskets on which her whole fate hung? And that Venus and Cupid, and all the gods and goddesses, and nymphs, and fauns were standing round, as they are here, to watch the course of her destiny? Could not you paint a picture of the scene, Mr. Wilmot? I hope that you feel the same affection for Portia that I feel, and are ready to do her so much honour.”

“Let me first,” replied Julian, “have the advantage of a few more hints. How shall I represent Portia, Miss Ratcliffe? Have you a model for her? Is she personified in your mind's eye?”

“Oh, yes! most distinctly; and I doubt not that you will be able to find her prototype among her countrywomen. You should seek it not among the pale, stern Romans, but rather among the fair haired Venetians. She must have a countenance full of frankness and ingenuousness; an expansive brow, smooth and polished as marble, presenting to your mind a lively image of truth and purity. Let her eyes be brilliant and piercing, to denote all the quick discernment of her character, and yet melting and even pensive, to express its tender sensibility. She should have a short and curling lip, mocking, but not sarcastic; you might just guess as you marked its curve, ‘what a deal of scorn’ would ‘look beautiful’ on it, if provoked by the detection of aught that was mean or base. Enough—I will leave you to furnish what else is requisite. I should like to see the carnation tints I so often hear you talk of, mantle on her glowing cheek, and disappear again as rapidly; but I have already told you more than you can express in *one* moment of time, for,” said Mercedes archly, “painting is not poetry!”

“No,” replied Julian, “but your description is. Do not let us lose sight of Portia yet. Your picture has brought her before my eyes with all the vividness of reality. And now I should like to know why you love her so much?”

Mercedes paused to consider:

“How shall I describe exactly why I love her,”

she said. "It is difficult to put our thoughts and feelings into words that convey them clearly to others."

"It is so," replied Julian. "Is the great charm of Portia's character to be found in her superiority to all petty emotions of jealousy? Many women would have shown a doubt of Bassanio's love, or thought to demonstrate the tenderness of their own, by resenting, or at least lamenting his necessary departure at the moment when he had won her. But Portia did neither. Not a thought of self entered her mind. She was so much one with Bassanio, that his friend was her friend; she experienced the same emotions that he experienced on learning the situation of that friend; her heart did not merely acquiesce in, but actually suggested the same mode of action, that his heart was impelled to suggest, by the violence of the grief and fear that filled it, on the contemplation of the generous Antonio's probable fate. But no sooner is Bassanio departed, than Portia feels that she is separated from part of herself; her thoughts follow him; she pants to rejoin him, and her ready wit soon furnishes her with the method of gratifying her wish."

"Oh, she is a noble creature!" exclaimed Mercedes with enthusiasm, "and I see that you know her even better than I do. How much I like to meet with those who love and esteem the same characters, be they real or imaginary, that I love and esteem!"

Julian made no reply to this exclamation; he

felt the dangerous delight of such sympathy but too deeply. They walked on in silence till Mercedes stooped to gather a flower, and as she held it in her hand, she said :

“Do you remember a beautiful simile in Coleridge which he must have written, I think, in such a scene as this :

Flowers are lovely ; love is flower-like,
Friendship is a sheltering tree—

Does not the combination which one views here, between these flowers, nature’s loveliest productions, and the grandeur of these stately trees, strike your imagination, and can you not suppose that it would easily suggest this idea to a poet?”

“Yes,” replied Julian, “I can, but you had turned my thoughts wholly to Shakspeare, and I was meditating on the more melancholy reflection that occurred to poor Imogen, when lying on the green sward, strewn over with such fair and perishable blossoms as these :

These flowers are like the pleasures of the world.”

“Why then,” said Mercedes quickly, “it were better not to pluck them, for in the attempt to grasp them and make them more our own, we but shorten their already too brief existence. ’Tis best to let them bloom and die their natural death ; and you know that though none of them are lasting, still there is a bright succession of them with every season ; and so no period of life is without its enjoyments, agreeable enough to make

existence cheerful, but too fleeting to have power to bind us strongly to it. Then there is winter, almost bereft of charms, which makes us grow willing to resign this world to enter another where there is a 'fairer earth, a fairer sky.' Then

A calm awaiting seems to be
O'er leaf and wave.
A calm undressing, all so silently,
For calmness of the grave,
Unrepining." *

Julian listened to her sweet voice with admiration.

"Alas!" he said, "the thoughts suggested to me by that line were far different from your beautiful and healthful ones. I thought of blasted hopes, bitter disappointments, and false friends—"

Mercedes looked grave and thoughtful as she listened to these words; then, not without surprise, she answered:

"Yet why should such dispiriting images occur to you more than to me? You have not yet wrestled with ill-fortune; why is it that the young and the prosperous are not happy? Why have they these dark forebodings, when it seems to others that they should bask in sunshine? We see the shade, but we see not the cloud that casts it. I too experience these feelings sometimes—"

Mercedes and Julian having reached the end of

* Thoughts in Past Years.

the path they were following, came at once, before the former had finished speaking, on others of their party who were talking and laughing gaily, and whose lively tones grated discordantly on the ears of both.

Lady Sylvester effectually cut short the thread of their discourse by calling Mercedes to her, and drawing her arm within hers, continued to walk with her during the rest of the time that they remained in the garden.

CHAPTER XVII.

Sworn by your command,
Which my love makes religion to obey.

SHAKSPEARE.

“WELL, Mr. Wilmot, I am to consider that you have acceded to my request?” said Mercedes, as they parted at the close of the day.

“Undoubtedly,” replied Julian, though he knew that Lord Sylvester heard his words: “if you have really determined to honour me so highly; but permit me, Miss Ratcliffe, to beg that you will reconsider the subject, and that if you change your mind, you will forget, without hesitation or scruple, whatever you have said to me, and employ any other painter you may deem better qualified to give you satisfaction.”

“Oh! I am sure that I shall not change my mind. I am sure that my father will like a picture of yours better than one by any other painter.”

Julian drew a little nearer and said in a lower voice:

“Of course, Miss Ratcliffe, you will not decide without consulting with your friends; Lord Sylvester, for instance, surely you will seek his opinion?”

“Oh! he admires your works so much. It is pretended modesty in you to affect to be ignorant of that.”

“But,” continued Julian, who saw that Lord Sylvester was now out of hearing, “did he recommend me in this instance? Did he suggest the idea of applying to me?”

Mercedes paused before she answered; she feared that her words might mortify the young painter, or even induce him to recede; but her candour forbid her to withhold any part of the truth, and she said:

“No, he did not. The idea was certainly my own; Lady Sylvester agreed with it, and when we mentioned it to him, he said nothing, but when I asked him if he could name any reason for preferring any other painter, he did not do so.”

Mercedes' embarrassment was scarcely heeded by Julian, whose mind was engrossed by the conflict between his own strong inclination, and the unwillingness that he felt to act contrary to the opinion of his friend. His desire to ascertain how far his patron's disapprobation of this design had led him, and how far he had declared it to Mercedes had been irresistible. Having effected this, with some secret misgivings and self-reproach, he departed, but he did not retract his consent.

Scarcely had a day elapsed before Mercedes sent to ask him when he would put his promise into execution; and this time she employed a very unacceptable messenger, Arundel Wentworth. Julian was not without a suspicion that Lord Sylvester had refused to be the bearer of her inquiry; he had not seen him in the interval, and he felt guilty of having incurred his displeasure. This

feeling of annoyance rendered him still less inclined than usual to conceal his dislike of the unceremonious manner in which Wentworth commonly addressed him. He replied to his inquiries briefly, saying that he would call on Miss Ratcliffe himself.

“Has Lady Sylvester any engagement that would prevent my admission if I come at eight o’clock this evening? I could bring with me a few designs that I have made, and might perhaps be honoured with the opinions of Miss Ratcliffe’s friends before I commence the picture.”

Arundel replied carelessly that he could not answer for his mother’s engagements, but that he would say that he was coming, and if they could not receive him, he supposed that they would send him a message before the evening. So saying he quitted the room.

Julian returned to the work on which he had been employed before he entered, and which he had put out of sight as soon as he had heard Wentworth’s voice. It was a design for Mercedes’ portrait, in which he had not yet afforded himself any satisfaction. He possessed a remarkable facility in drawing from memory, and often, on his return home, would sketch any face which had attracted his attention. We have said that he had already done many such remembrances of that beauty which was the ‘tyrant spirit of his thought.’ He had never contemplated the countenance of Mercedes, when in repose, without

thinking that in it he beheld a personification of all that combined dignity, peace, and tenderness, by

Painters given
Unto their virgin Queen of Heaven.

Peace, indeed, was the characteristic of it. Her eyes were of the deepest blue; her skin of the most transparent fairness; but her hair, instead of being of that pale gold which Raphael usually gives to his Madonnas, was of the darkest, richest chestnut; and her eyebrows, of which they are almost wholly destitute, were dark though most delicately delineated. He felt that no painter could hope to portray the bland sweetness and bewitching animation of her frequent smile, and it was rather a moment of tranquillity, or even pensive thoughtfulness, that he determined to select.

Wearied at length, though still unsatisfied, he snatched up his hat, and mounted the Pincian hill to breathe the fresh air, and to see the sun depart in glory.

He was very desirous to find Lord Sylvester, though inwardly half-ashamed to meet him, and not venturing to go in search of him. He was still determined to persist in his first assertion that the course he was preparing to follow by no means aggravated his danger; that the Rubicon having been long since past, it was now immaterial to him to show the better part of valour. As fate would have it, the first person he met was Lord Sylvester, but he was walking with some

brother lords, and Julian thought that he greeted him coldly ; he did not for a moment suppose that this circumstance was the occasion of his so doing. Lord Sylvester had too much real dignity to suppose that a peer could degrade himself by a becoming condescension to a painter. Julian felt that he was angry, and he walked sorrowfully on, half penitent and half obdurate, and leaning over the balustrade, gazed down on the busy Piazza below, where men look like ants running to and fro on an ant-hill, and speedily forgot where he was. He had not long indulged this reverie, when some one roused him from it by touching his arm. Looking up he saw Raymond beside him. This sight did not dispose him to be better pleased, for he had lately conceived an aversion to this man, whom, when first he came to Rome, he had allowed to be his companion. His loquacity had become wearisome, and he had more than once taken upon himself to rally Julian on a change in his spirits ; he had, however, too much tact to continue a subject which he saw to be unpleasing, and therefore soon abstained from repeating this offence. He had an extraordinary faculty of discovering every body's secrets, of knowing what was passing in the *intérieur* of every one's family, and of being perfectly informed of the particulars of every occurrence before they were generally known. Now all these accomplishments made him only exceedingly disagreeable to Julian, though they constituted him a favourite with the world at

large. He was, however, a man of unruffled good humour, and not easily discouraged in his attempts to gain the confidence of any he attached himself to; so without noticing Julian's face of repugnance, he passed his arm through his, and insisted that he should make the *giro* of the hill with him.

"What a lucky fellow you are, Wilmot," he began, "every thing falls to you. Why here are you who never executed a portrait in your life, selected by the very queen of beauty, *selon moi*; and I, who fag every day at producing dimples where there are only wrinkles to be discovered, and paint roses where none ever bloomed, the soil not being adapted to their growth, am passed over and neglected. Now confess that I am very generous in forgiving you this piece of good luck."

Julian coloured with vexation and surprise, and then inquired where Raymond had obtained his information. His companion stared at the tone of his interrogation, and replied:

"Why, do you suppose that Miss Ratcliffe makes a profound secret of the honour she has conferred?"

Julian saw the absurdity of his question, and again felt embarrassed.

"I only wish that she would do so," he returned, "until the picture be completed. It would prevent the utterance of many impertinent remarks."

"What sort of impertinent remarks do you mean? Impertinent to the artist and his work?"

or impertinent to the fair subject?—Inquiries as to who is to be the happy possessor of the picture when completed?—Whose taste will be most deferentially consulted in its progress?—Who determined the choice of the painter?—”

“All that I mean,” interrupted Julian impatiently, “is, that now I shall be pestered with the visits of all Miss Ratcliffe’s acquaintance, and persecuted with unmeaning criticisms and worthless advice.”

“If you are not prepared to meet with such annoyances as these, I advise you not to invade my province; do not commence portrait painter?”

“Can you imagine that such is my intention?” exclaimed Julian with some contempt, and then checked himself, remembering whom he was addressing. His companion, however, seemed insensible of the slight, and replied carelessly :

“Well, you are certainly right to make an exception in favour of Miss Ratcliffe.”

“Her father has acted towards me with the greatest generosity, and I feel bound to make him all the return in my power.”

“Oh! it is at his request that you undertake this picture?”

Julian made no answer, and Raymond continued:

“When you have begun it, I shall come to see you. I have at least greater experience in this branch of our art, and may give you some useful hints.”

Julian’s gratitude was but faintly expressed, and

at length Raymond quitted him to join another party, among whom Julian perceived, though he scarcely glanced at them as they past, Mrs. Annesly Marchmont. This lady had excited Julian's dislike, unmitigated by admiration of her beauty, and he sedulously kept aloof from her magic circle, without being guilty of the absurd vanity of supposing that it was remarked by any one in it that he did so.

He had instituted in his own mind a comparison between her and Mercedes, in which, in every point, he gave the advantage to her he loved; and while he did so, he still clearly discerned the reasons why the first maintained a more generally acknowledged dominion over society at large. The means which she employed to acquire popularity were of a subtle nature, and such as the "artless and unpractised" mind of Mercedes could not even detect. She lavished unbounded flattery on all whom she addressed, for she rarely addressed any but those whom it was her interest, though perhaps only for the moment to flatter. In order that none might, in consequence of her fair speeches and bland courtesy, presume too much upon her favour, she exercised a haughty caprice, which cast those, who thought they had made most progress in it, into endless doubts and difficulties as to how they were to proceed. The enchantress, Armida, might have learnt more arts from Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, and could scarcely have been gifted with superior beauty to give them efficacy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

E per più non poter, fo quant' io posso—

Ho sì avvezza

La mente a contemplar sola costei,

Ch' altro non vede ; e ciò che non è lei,

Già per antica usanza, odia e disprezza.

PETRARCA.

IN the evening, Julian, not having received any message to the contrary, collected the sketches he had made, and set out to the Palazzo. He felt very anxious to see whether Lord Sylvester would be present or not. "If he know the purpose of my coming," said he to himself, "and refuse to wait for it, I shall learn that his anger is unabated, and that I have lost a friend. And what a friend!"

Julian walked on in melancholy abstraction; then he inwardly exclaimed: "Yet what would he have me do? How could I refuse such a request? He frequently reproaches me with the folly of my passion, yet what can be weaker than the conduct which, in this instance, he prescribes? Shall I neglect an obvious duty—that of paying the debt of gratitude—from the selfish fear of aggravating my own sufferings?"

Thus justifying the risk he was resolved to run, and determined to show his friend that he con-

sidered himself aggrieved by his coldness, he arrived at the place of his destination, and raised a trembling hand to the door. The servant, who answered his summons, looked surprised when she saw him prepare to enter with the undoubting air of one who was expected; and stopping him, she told him that all the family were out. With a feeling of astonishment, not unmixed with displeasure, Julian asked if they had left no message for him?

“*Niente!*” answered the woman, impatient to be gone, and closed the door leaving him to his reflection.

He slowly took up his portfolio and descended the stairs. The porter smiled as he saw him return, and said:

“I told you that they were all out, but you would not listen to me, or you might have spared yourself the trouble of mounting one hundred and three steps to inquire.”

Julian, who heard him now, though in his previous haste he had not been sensible of his address, asked if he knew whither they were gone, and heard that they had dined at a house which he knew to be occupied by some of their friends.

“They will go to the French Embassy before they come home, I suppose,” added the loquacious Italian, and Julian resolved that he also would be there.

Wilmot, as he walked homeward, could not conceal from himself how bitterly he felt this first

instance of neglect and discourtesy on the part of Mercedes.

“She should not have treated a tradesman or a menial in such a manner,” he said; “perhaps my avocation ranks in her esteem scarcely higher. She looks on me as the hired limner at every man’s beck, and the haughty Wentworth no doubt rejoiced in the thought of the rebuff I should meet with at their door, while his brother will deem it a salutary check to my presumption.”

Having, by the due indulgence of such thoughts as these, roused up a sufficient degree of angry pride to bear him with dignity through the evening, and after repeatedly representing to himself the abject folly of continuing to seek one, who already began to treat him with scorn, Julian set out to the French *ricevimento* with the sole purpose of being again in her presence.

As soon as Wilmot entered the room, he looked around for the group he sought, and he quickly discovered it. Wentworth was, it is true, at Mercedes’ side, but the graciousness with which both she and Lady Sylvester welcomed him, at once banished the idea of their having intended to wound his feelings by their neglect, and Mercedes’ first smile convinced him how very ridiculous it had been to interpret such a trifling act of forgetfulness into a serious affront. He now felt heartily ashamed of all the angry sensations which a few minutes before had appeared to him so spirited and so just.

So entirely did Miss Ratcliffe seem to have forgotten everything respecting his useless visit, that, at length, finding some of his former indignation reviving, and profiting by the removal of Arundel from his station to place himself near her, he ventured to allude to his disappointment, saying :

“Perhaps if you will yourself appoint a time to see me, I may be more fortunate than I was in the selection of my own hour.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mercedes, “when did you wish to see me?”

“Did not Mr. Wentworth tell you that I intended to call this evening if you were disengaged?”

“No, indeed,” replied Mercedes, but with an air that showed that she did not suppose such an omission could be seriously resented by any one. “I dare say that he forgot all you said to him. But,” she added, seeing an expression of vexation pass over Wilmot’s countenance, “I am really very sorry that this mistake should have occurred; he shall certainly make us all proper apologies for his carelessness.”

Julian had still a question that he wished to ask Mercedes, and with a little hesitation he communicated to her an idea that had that day occurred to him.

“Do you not think, Miss Ratcliffe,” he said, “that your picture would perhaps afford greater pleasure to Mr. Ratcliffe, if in it you wore the cos-

tume of your mother's country? He dwells so frequently on your resemblance to her—will you authorise me to select it?"

Mercedes did not reply for a moment; when she spoke, her eyes were swimming with tears and she said in a low voice :

"Yes. I thank you for the thought, and for every thought you have, the object of which is to give my father pleasure. I am grateful to you for your gratitude to him. There seems to be a law between your family and mine, that we shall still be giving and receiving."

CHAPTER XIX.

Je n'aime pas les faiseurs de remontrances. Vous tournez les choses d'une manière qu'il semble que vous avez raison. J'avais les plus belles pensées du monde et vos discours m'ont brouillé tout cela.—MOLIÈRE.

ON the following morning, Julian's first waking thought was the appointment he had made, and he looked forward to the fulfilment of it with anxiety.

Our young painter, before his arrival in Rome, had led a life of great seclusion, mixing little with the world, and very rarely encountering any who were much more versed in it than himself. His tastes and pursuits were such as inclined him rather to solitude than to society, and during his residence in the country in England, the few companions of his own age that he possessed, could neither share in his occupations and pleasures nor in any way promote them. His father had bestowed on him an excellent education, and ill able to meet unnecessary expences had availed himself of the knowledge which he possessed, and of the skill in communicating it gained by experience, (the early years of his own life having been, as we have already said, devoted to tuition), to prepare

him for admission at the University, having entertained a hope of seeing him embrace the same profession as his own, which hope he only relinquished in consequence of the rapid, and surprising development of Julian's rare talent for the art of painting.

An ardent taste for literature had induced Julian, in spite of his passion for his favourite art, to devote more hours to the pursuit of it than are often bestowed in youth, by many who afterwards reap academical honours ; and having no particular aim in view, no goal to which he was bound to press with eager haste, he acquired more general knowledge, and more true cultivation of mind than those who are thus circumscribed in their studies. The tender affection which he entertained for his mother led him to pass much of his time in her society ; with her he culled the flowers that adorn the lighter branches of literature. He entered the regions of poetry, and became well acquainted with all the best authors of his own country, and of modern times.

But while in such attainments as these he far surpassed those of his age in general, in that premature acquaintance with the world and its ways, which a public education can scarcely fail to bestow, he was remarkably deficient. In consequence he frequently knew not what mode of conduct to look for in others, nor was able to detect the real motives of their actions. It is true that his acute

sensibility, and ready sympathy rendered him peculiarly alive to all emotions experienced by persons who were objects of interest to him. He readily divined what they would think and feel, though not always what outward expression they would allow themselves to give to their thoughts and feelings. His unaccustomed eye could not always penetrate the veil of reserve, which usually shades the face of truth. He had still to learn that it is only falsehood that presents her unblushing front to the gaze of all spectators, and that those feelings, motives and desires, which are avowed are not likely to be the real ones ; for though Julian was himself reserved, the reserve and bashfulness to which his nature was prone, and which his situation strengthened, were in him productive only of habitual silence, and never incited him to profess false sentiments. Emerging as he did from strict retirement, he was averse to give open expression to thoughts which were the offspring of solitary musings, and as yet untested by comparison with those of other minds ; and ill prepared to maintain against opposition opinions which were rather deduced from fanciful theories, than from keen observation. But when he directed his attention to those who were sophisticated by communion with the world, and who lived in voluntary and careful obedience to its laws, then again he was baffled ; confounded by his ignorance of the principles that were their rule of conduct, of the interests

which were the objects of their eager pursuit, and of the pleasures which they deemed solely worthy to be desired. He was also unaware how much both conduct and language are modified by conventional forms, and how much there is that is merely assumed as are our garments, according to the fashion of the day, and the necessity of the moment, even by many whose honour and rectitude deserve not to be doubted, whose sincerity in friendship may be relied upon, and whose principles are still unwarped. Ignorance of this fact occasioned him more difficulty in reading Lord Sylvester's character than that of any other near him. Wentworth and his mother soon became objects of distrust ; from the former he looked for nothing high and noble, and the latter he suspected to be as worldly, and more designing than her son ; but he was greatly perplexed when he sometimes observed Lord Sylvester, whom he highly esteemed, do and say many things that contradicted his preconceived ideas of his character.

Thus in the present instance, he thought that his patron's open declaration of disapproval of his conduct could not end where it began. He expected that if he persisted in pursuing the conduct which his adviser had represented as so objectionable, it would undoubtedly be at the expense of his friendship. He looked for a calm but inflexible demonstration of displeasure. Nevertheless on his arrival at the Palazzo, Julian saw Lord Sylvester among the group, from all of whom he received

a friendly greeting ; and found that when referred to by Mercedes, he did not decline entering into all the discussions that followed with ready interest, and it was his opinion that finally decided the selection of the design for the proposed picture.

Julian was greatly relieved by this behaviour ; but at the same time so much surprised by it, that in accordance with the ingenuousness of his temper, he determined to seek the earliest opportunity of addressing his patron once again on the subject, in order to ascertain what change had taken place in his view of it, since they had discussed it with such widely differing opinions.

The desired opportunity occurred on the evening of the same day, when Julian at the entrance into the Borghese gardens met Lord Sylvester alone. He paused to see whether his companionship would be sought or avoided, and his friend immediately joined him. Julian was too much occupied by the design he had formed to be able to enter freely into conversation ; at length he began to fear that Lord Sylvester would remark his abstraction, and receive fresh offence from it. He therefore determined to declare its cause, particularly as they had now entered one of those long ilex avenues, the profound shade and total seclusion of which render them so well adapted for private conferences. After having duly considered every possible way of approaching the subject, he finally commenced with an abruptness which made his companion start.

“ Surely, he said, “ I may believe that I am no

longer so much the object of your Lordship's disapprobation as I was a few days since?"

"To what do you allude?" asked Lord Sylvester drily.

"You cannot have forgotten that you expressed such a feeling, in no very measured terms, with regard to my intention."

"Oh! with respect to Miss Ratcliffe? Why should that disapprobation be lessened? I am aware of no change in the then existing circumstances. What I thought then, I think now; but I know not why it should avail to say again what I have already said uselessly. I intended, Mr. Wilmot, to act the part of a friend, in expressing to you distinctly, and without keeping back any portion of it, my opinion of the conduct you told me it was your purpose to pursue. My words did not shake your determination. You will not, I suppose, call for a repetition of arguments which you deemed without force. You are resolved to adopt your own measures. You are certainly at liberty to do so. It is true that you are young and inexperienced, and that I have ceased to be either in the extreme. These are facts which must be allowed, nor am I aware that they contain anything to offend, though I feel your arm twitch impatiently. I admire your talents; I like your truth, and your enthusiasm interests me. I do not intend to lose sight of you, nor shall I cease to endeavour to serve you, because I find you, in one instance, headstrong and mistaken. Nevertheless, you can

scarcely expect to find me constantly on the watch to reiterate counsels that will not be followed ; nor have I exactly leisure, or inclination to play the spy upon your movements. That you intend to act honourably, I perfectly believe ; that you will never swerve in conduct from your intention is, I think, more than you dare promise without presumption. A very wise author, whom I may recommend to your perusal (Boyle, I mean) says with admirable truth : ‘ He must often go further than he can with prudence, that will always go as far as he *thinks* he can with innocence.’ ”

“ If I can preserve innocence, I will give up all claims to prudence,” interrupted Julian scornfully.

“ I should like to induce you,” replied his friend, “ and all those who fall into the vulgar fault of speaking disparagingly of prudence, to look round the world, and to consider what the consequences of imprudence are, and you will frequently find that they are degrading enough in their nature to check your expression of contempt, or to change your application of it.”

“ It is the common rumour of society,” continued Julian with a desire to be contradicted or confirmed in his worst fears, “ that Miss Ratcliffe is already betrothed—”

“ To Arundel ?” asked Lord Sylvester, composedly.

“ Yes,” replied Julian, in a faltering voice.

“ Indeed ! I am not yet aware of the existence

of such an engagement." Lord Sylvester paused for a moment, and then changing his manner, he said frankly: "I do not mean to threaten that you shall never again hear a friendly warning from my lips. If your danger, and with it your blindness increase, I may be again provoked to speak, and perhaps again in vain. If I see you on the brink of rashly endangering your honour and your interests, I may again expostulate. At present I deem it useless to recur to the subject. You have chosen the part you will play; if enacted successfully, it may certainly be performed without injury to others, though not with safety to yourself. If this prove the case, I may admit of your conduct as pardonable, but it is neither advisable nor to be justified "

"One word more," added Lord Sylvester, after a pause. "Do not again mistake me so far as to suppose that any feeling I express dies with the expression of it. I am not fond of dictating sentiments to others, nor desirous to make converts to my own opinions; but what I say one day certainly is not forgotten the next. Where you leave me, there may you find me; but not unless you seek me."

Julian was more abashed and disconcerted by these dispassionate words than he would have been by the severest rebukes. To have provoked such would scarcely have been altogether displeasing to him, for if his patron had outstepped the bounds of cool reason, or trespassed beyond the

rights of friendly expostulation, he might have resented his conduct in turn. But now he was reduced to absolute silence, and endured all the humiliation of beholding himself an object of pity to one whom he highly respected. He would rather have been blamed than thus compassionated. He felt degraded; he saw that he had sunk in Lord Sylvester's estimation, and that he considered his weakness not inferior to his wilfulness. One source of doubt and difficulty was, however, removed by this conversation; he now knew the footing on which he stood with Lord Sylvester; he also felt that he had been treated with condescending kindness, and a consideration that would have been shown him by few, thus elevated above him in rank. He was at a loss how to reply; at length with an air of somewhat proud humility, he acknowledged the sincere pleasure it gave him to find that he was permitted to retain his friendship, and remarked that the future would prove whether he had acted too rashly, or whether Lord Sylvester's fears were too easily excited. This was the conclusion of their discourse.

Lady Sylvester was now informed that it would be requisite for the young heiress to pass many hours in the painter's studio, to afford him time to execute his picture. She immediately resolved that she would not incommode herself by attendance there; she had little disposition to allow her time to be broken in upon, or her pleasures interrupted, by any engagements made by Mercedes.

But this selfish unconcern for all that did not regard herself was not meant to be visible to the eye of her young companion, and she hastened to procure her a fitting chaperone in the person of an elderly lady, Mrs. Pembruge. Having engaged her to accede to her wishes, she communicated her arrangement to Mercedes, pathetically giving as its reason that to frequent a studio in which oil painting was being executed would absolutely destroy her. Mercedes could not, of course, consent to be the cause of so much suffering.

All preliminaries being now adjusted, those dangerous hours began which were to rob Julian of all remaining peace, but which were too delightful as they passed to let him recognize until they ended, the extent of the injury they inflicted.

'Tis when the wound is stiffening with the cold,
The warrior first feels pain.

CHAPTER XX.

Periglioso è cercar quel che trovato
Trastulla, sì, ma più tormenta assai,
Non ritrovato. TASSO.

C'est ordinairement où l'on décide le plus qu'on prouve le moins ; quoiqu'on réponde à toutes les difficultés, on en résout très peu.—GIRARD.

LORD SYLVESTER frequently accompanied or followed Mercedes to the painter's studio. Whether it was that he was really interested in the progress of the portrait, or whether he thought that as his mother and his brother rarely visited them, and Mrs. Pembruge, poor woman, was so afflicted with deafness as to be scarcely able to join in the conversation without the use of a trumpet, and thus, these interviews were too nearly approaching to *tête-à-têtes* for his young friend to enjoy them in safety ; be the cause what it would, his presence there was frequent, and appeared highly agreeable to all.

Mercedes began to find that, during these hours time past more pleasantly than in any others of the day ; she had, of late, she scarce knew why, perceived it to hang heavily on her hands. Mercedes was very young, and her character, as yet

undeveloped to others, was also a secret to herself. She was far from analysing or examining with much closeness the origin of feelings of indefinable longing that filled her bosom, and which were in truth yearnings after a sympathy which did not exist for her, among those whom she had ignorantly elected her friends ; but it was impossible for her to disguise from herself that she was rapidly ceasing to taste the same joyous happiness which had been her's a short time before. A depression of spirits existed for which she could not account, but of which she was painfully sensible. She could not say : " here is my pain ;" but there was a sickness of heart that passed not away, and of which she almost lost the recollection when conversing with Julian and his friend ; discussing with them topics which not only afforded her mind occupation at the moment, but led her on to seek the attainment of more knowledge, and furnished her with themes for future thought and study.

Being also gifted with real taste, she could not, in spite of her disquietude, cease to derive a most lively pleasure from visits to the scenes of well-deserved celebrity by which she was surrounded, and from the contemplation of those glorious works of art, which never fail to reward those who are constant and unwearied in returning to seek their presence, by fresh disclosures of beauties previously unobserved. Each visit reveals new charms, and as the spirit of their beholder becomes

more and more imbued with the same spirit that first created them, draughts of pleasure, of daily increasing sweetness, are drunk at the spring of inspiration. These delights might have cheered the most deep-rooted melancholy; they generally dispelled the passing clouds that darkened Mercedes' serenity.

At the hour when the sitting terminated, Lady Sylvester would call for Mercedes, who frequently communicated to Julian their projects for the remainder of the day, and often invited him to follow them to any spot of peculiar interest which they were about to visit. With her usual unhesitating frankness, she did not conceal from the young painter the satisfaction which she derived from the intercourse between them.

"How agreeable," she one day exclaimed, when Lord Sylvester also was present, "are the hours that I spend here! I am always sorry when my sitting comes to an end. Tell me, if you can, why in society conversation is generally so dull? We render ours very interesting, at least to ourselves who hold it, by selecting subjects that afford us mutual pleasure, instead of repeating unprofitable, wearisome gossip of the day, composed of anecdotes, generally ill-natured, for the truth of which none can vouch, and those who condescend to repeat them are, for the most part, incapable of giving them a foreign charm by the wit with which they tell them. What is worst

of all is, that these topics, so destitute of any recommendation, seem inexhaustible; they meet you every where. But for my part, I assure you I have many thoughts that appear to me very new and fresh, but am afraid to utter them, and this fear is inspired by that which I discover in others. But surely every one has sufficient individuality to afford something original, though the contributions of some might be but small, and yet that something they never venture to offer, and I dare not be more bold."

"As you say," replied Lord Sylvester with a smile, "there does appear to be a species of false humility in the world which prevents even those, who, in other respects, we should be inclined to deem very arrogant, from ever daring to appear in their natural colours. They would not for a moment present you with themselves; borrowed wit, false sentiments are all they offer. But I am convinced that some of them are justly punished for so doing. '*Ils perdent par calcul le succès qu'ils auraient obtenu par nature.*'"

"Yes," answered Mercedes, "conversation would then afford a diversity for which all would be grateful. Originality in one would be productive of it in another. One new thought always suggests another, for though memory and art may be exhausted, nature cannot. Do you know," she added, after a pause, "that I imagine that society must be more agreeable to people who have neither very decided tastes, nor pursuits, than to those who have."

“Why so?” asked Lord Sylvester, who was fond of eliciting Miss Ratcliffe’s sentiments.

“I fancy that you find more amusement in society than Mr. Wilmot does. Your mind must be more free than his can be, to adopt the suggestions of other minds; and can more readily follow any turn that conversation takes.”

“Because,” said Julian, “Lord Sylvester is remarkable for his various information.”

“Exactly in accordance with what I mean!” replied Mercedes quickly. “A person who does not greatly prefer one thing to another, would naturally acquire something of all. I have often seen Mr. Wilmot silent, abstracted, and evidently perfectly uninterested, until some remark was made that related to his beloved art; then, indeed, his countenance becomes animated, and he joins in the conversation with every appearance of real delight. Lord Sylvester, on the contrary, seems only to experience a certain agreeable pleasure, equally felt while very different topics are being discussed, and which a change of subject does not greatly heighten or diminish.”

Both Lord Sylvester and Julian smiled at this description of themselves, which neither allowed to be at all in their favour. Julian asserted that, if just, it proved him to possess a very narrow mind to be thus filled with one idea to the exclusion of all others.

“You have absolutely decided,” Lord Sylvester replied, “that I am destitute of a spark of genius; for the state of placid indifference which

you attribute to me, certainly is not demonstrative of its existence. You deem me eminently fitted to shine in that style of conversation, which, Hazlitt says, is now becoming nearly universal, and describes as ‘a dull compound of politics, criticism, chemistry, and metaphysics.’ ”

“No, not necessarily dull,” replied Mercedes ; “give me your metaphysics, and Mr. Wilmot your criticism, and neither of us will call you dull. But, seriously, I think that criticism is your true province, for I have a conviction that to exercise an art absolutely disables one from criticising it. It is necessary to the existence of judicious criticism that there should be a class of people possessed of real taste and extensive knowledge, but free from that *besoin de faire* that produces painters, versifiers, musicians, and all other artists. Will you give me your support in this opinion, Mr. Wilmot ?”

“I should like to hear why you hold it,” answered Julian.

“Let me consider a little, for I find it difficult to express exactly what I mean, and often say nearly the contrary of what I intend.”

“The reason of your opinion may be this,” said Lord Sylvester, “you probably think that jealousy incapacitates artists for giving, if not for forming just judgments of works of art produced by their fellow-labourers. Remember Titian’s envy, and how he indulged it, even with regard to his own brother, whom he dissuaded from attempts which he saw would rival his own.”

"That is not the cause of your opinion, is it Miss Ratcliffe?" asked Julian.

"No—I leave every approach to satire to Lord Sylvester."

"Yes," replied Julian, "you are too much in earnest when you speak to be satirical."

"Why will you not say, too little malicious? After this digression I have still to tell my meaning. Though I do not believe that you could be envious, neither do I think that you would be impartial. I feel that painters would be more mercifully disposed one towards another than the critic, however candid, would be towards them. Being much more sensible of the difficulties that had been encountered, you would esteem any degree of success, though falling far short of excellence, more highly than others are prepared to do. It may certainly be very laudable to come near the mark, but still the prize ought not to be obtained without hitting it."

"But surely a judicious critic should be alive to all the grades of excellence?"

"Undoubtedly, but might not a painter be too much so? Nor do I think that a person who exercises an art, is always quite disposed to point out precisely where the difficulty really lies on account of his feeling of insecurity as to whether he shall overcome it with more perfect success, when he attempts it himself; he would not declare with openness exactly how, and where, and why, the painter he was examining had failed. In discussing all these questions, he would feel that he was fur-

nishing weapons against himself, while the critic would decide them with unscrupulous temerity, knowing that he could not be taxed with falling short in his practice of his own precepts."

"How did you acquire so deep an insight into all these motives and feelings?" asked Lord Sylvester with a smile.

"Ah! you wish to laugh at my discourse, rather than to agree with it. Do you not believe, Mr. Wilmot, that I have arrived at some truths?"

"Undoubtedly I do, for it seems to me that I have felt what you describe."

"So have I in a degree, just enough to occasion me to find it out," said Mercedes; "and these remarks have led me to a discovery of the existence of a great analogy between moral philosophy and the art of painting. I am sure much instruction might be derived from following it up, in which opinion I have been strengthened by my study of a book of yours, Lord Sylvester, which I knew must be worth stealing, from having observed your fondness for it. I mean Boyle's *Occasional Reflections*. If he can say so much that is wise and beautiful on the occasion of 'giving his dog some meat,' or of 'being carved to at a feast,' I am sure that a student at his easel might find scope for quite as profound reflections, if he knew as well how to make them. Some day you shall see such a volume proceed from my pen. I will dedicate it to you, Mr. Wilmot, and bring it to you to be revised."

"I have often thought of writing the *Miseries* of the Studio, but never the *Moral Reflections*," replied Julian, as he obliterated with an air of disgust some of the touches he had most carefully executed.

"I greatly prefer your idea, Miss Ratcliffe," said Lord Sylvester; "but I really think that the dedication ought to be to me, as my book suggested your design, and also, I assure you, I fear that the author you so warmly commend is far too rational for an imitator of his to please Mr. Wilmot."

"Too rational!" exclaimed Mercedes. "Is it possible that Mr. Wilmot is less rational than I am? Do you really think it likely that I shall be too rational to please him?"

Lord Sylvester smiled at this question and then said: "*L'esprit n'est pas incompatible avec un peu de folie*, and still less so is genius."

"Your compliment is so ambiguous," exclaimed Mercedes laughing, "that Mr. Wilmot will not acknowledge it. Yet, I think, in spite of its little praise, he might receive it gratefully, for he never pays any himself; at least not to the living. On the dead, he will waste the most enthusiastic effusions!"

"Yes," replied Lord Sylvester; "and to return once more to our first subject, you must allow, Miss Ratcliffe, that though painters may not be qualified to excel in criticism, they are certainly capable of deriving tenfold more pleasure than any other beholder can, from the contemplation

of a fine picture. Critics may gaze long and learnedly, but in comparison with them, with how 'blank an eye!' "

" Say no more; you do but remind me how much I envy Mr. Wilmot the power of admiring as I have seen him admire. A power we ask in vain of dry, cold, learning to bestow is to be attained only with a portion of kindred genius; without that we can only 'see, not feel' the beauty of those works which he will rival!" exclaimed Mercedes, her face beaming with enthusiasm like that she was describing. She paused awhile thoughtfully, and then with some timidity she resumed, addressing Julian:

" Did you ever read Gessner's description of an artist? When he says: 'There is no celebrity for the artist, if the love of his art do not become a vehement passion; if the hours he employs to cultivate it be not for him the most delicious hours of his life; if study become not his true existence and his first happiness; if even in the night-time the ideas of his art do not occupy his vigils or his dreams; if in the morning he fly not to his work, impatient to recommence what he left unfinished.' I read this passage some mornings ago, and it has remained impressed on my memory ever since, because I thought it must be so exact a description of you, Mr. Wilmot. Am I mistaken?" And she turned towards Julian with an earnestness which embarrassed him, and waited for his reply.

" You have known all these feelings, have you not?" she repeated.

"I have," replied Julian, raising his eyes to her face as she spoke.

"I think that I have also," added Mercedes thoughtfully and timidly, "and yet I am no genius. And," she continued after a pause, speaking with a bright, sunny smile, expressive of, and infusing hope, "remember and believe what Gessner says :— 'these are the marks of him who labours for glory, and for posterity.' "

Julian listened with joy to this promise of success made by Mercedes' lips ; but they were both recalled from their pleasant *rêverie* by the voice of Lord Sylvester, who said :

"You have been talking poetry in prose. Now I will talk it to you in verse, and repeat some lines of Coleridge which, I know, will well accord with your sentiments :—

We may not hope from outward form to win
The passion, and the life whose fountains are within.
Oh ! Lady, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live :
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud !
And would we aught behold of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless, ever anxious crowd,
Ah ! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element."

Is not this beautiful ?"

"Beautiful !" responded Julian and Mercedes.

"Stop, there is more of it :

We in ourselves rejoice !
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light."

Lord Sylvester ceased, and before Mercedes could speak again, (for she was one who was silenced when her feelings were touched, as they were by all that was beautiful,) Mrs. Pembruge, having read Galignani's Messenger three times over during the course of the sitting, remarked that she saw Lady Sylvester's carriage enter the court. A discourse ensued on the progress which Julian had made, and then Mercedes and her companions departed.

CHAPTER XXI.

Non può far Morte il dolce viso amaro :
Ma 'l dolce viso dolce può far Morte.

PETRARCA.

ONE day Mercedes, having quitted Julian's *studio*, drove through the streets of Rome with Lady Sylvester, every moment encountering some work of beauty and of fame. As they were without any definite object of pursuit, she proposed as they passed the church of St. Cecilia in Trastevere to enter it, giving as a reason for her wish :

“ I have heard that Maderno's statue is very lovely, and I think I must take home one of those small copies of it in marble which can be had, if the original equals my expectation.”

On their entrance into the church, they perceived an artist apparently employed in drawing the work they were come to see.

“ Ah !” exclaimed Mercedes, “ there is Mr. Wilmot, I see he is making a study. How glad I am to find him here ! I will ask him to be our cicerone.”

And she crossed the church to the place where he was standing. No sooner did he perceive her, than he laid aside his work and approached the altar with her. The recumbent figure of the Saint

is said to be in the attitude in which she was found lying after she was slain.

There is something in this statue so simply pathetic, so touching, and so sad, that they both gazed on it silently, and with full hearts. Mercedes felt strongly reminded of Byron's description of the first day of death, and she almost unconsciously repeated in a half audible voice the lines :

He who hath bent him o'er the dead
Ere the first day of death is fled ;
The first dark day of nothingness—
The last of danger and distress ;
Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,
And marked the mild angelic air—
The rapture of repose that's there.
And—but for that cold, changeless brow,
Where cold obstruction's apathy
Appals the gazing mourner's heart,
As if to him it could impart
The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon—
Yes ! but for this, and this alone,
Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant's power,
So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
The first, last look by death revealed !

The statue is hewn from a block of the purest marble, unsullied by a single stain ; its spotless whiteness adds to the modest grace of the recumbent attitude, and of the shrouding folds of the drapery. One delicate, snowy foot is revealed to view ; her hands also are stretched forth on the pavement, while the head and face, which are

turned away, are completely enveloped in her robe. It would be possible to gaze upon her, and to say, "she is not dead, but sleepeth!" It would be possible to wait beside her for the hour of waking, but that the lifelessness of the fair hands, lying heavily on the ground, their slight wrists cruelly bound together with a thick cord, and the unsightly seam drawn across that bending throat, tell us that she died of pain! The bare idea, thus suggested, that corporeal sufferings were ever inflicted on a frame so lovely, and so feminine, oppresses the heart with anguish.

Mercedes was alone with Julian, for Lady Sylvester was exploring the church, accompanied by the garrulous old man who showed it. Had this been otherwise, she would not have suffered without a struggle, the tears to fall 'so feelingly and fast,' as she leant over the balustrades which separated them from the statue.

She was not long unmolested. Another party came round the spot, all loudly uttering such remarks as they were disposed to make. Mercedes withdrew in haste from the group, and said to Julian,—

"Let me come and look at your drawing."

He followed her, guessing her motive, and obeying her request. She took the sketch into her hand, and looking up, said,

"I believe you are the only person here who would not tax me with folly and weakness. Even in this, perhaps, I am mistaken," she said, mis-

interpreting the silence which Julian maintained. "Some," said Mercedes, her cheek crimsoning at the thought of the imputation, "would accuse me of affectation."

"That is an unworthy folly," exclaimed Julian, eagerly, "of which I never yet saw you guilty."

"I have feigned sometimes," replied Mercedes, thoughtfully; "but then I did not feign to feel: but not to feel. Mr. Wilmot," she exclaimed, after a brief silence, summoning up a smile, although—

Upon her cheek the stain did sit
Of an old tear, that was not washed off yet.

"You are, I am afraid, a bad companion for me; you encourage me in a sort of melancholy that I should quickly shake off in other society; and in the indulgence of thoughts that I never dare to express to any one else. I think you do me harm."

These were Mercedes' parting words to the young painter, for Lady Sylvester was now ready to quit the church, and she hastened to follow her.

The next day as Mercedes quitted Julian's studio, she told him that they were going to visit the church of San Gregorio sul Monte Celio.

"We must see," she said, "the splendid frescoes which adorn it. Besides, the remembrance of our national obligations to the saint should make us pay him a visit, and we shall behold the chair on

which he sat, the bed on which he lay, and the table at which he entertained an angel."

On the arrival of Mercedes and her friends, they found the painter already there, on the steps that lead up to the church, gazing on the magnificent view which that position commands of the ruins of the Palace of the Cæsars. They all paused to look for awhile on the melancholy scene, which can never be described in words more faithful than those employed by Byron, the truth of whose epithets cannot be sufficiently admired and appreciated by any who have not tested them, by comparing them on the spot with the scenes which gave them birth.

Cypress and ivy, weed and wall-flower grown
Matted and massed together—hillocks heaped
On what were chambers—arch crushed—column strewn
In fragments—choked up vaults, and frescoes steeped
In subterranean damp, where the owl peeped
Deeming it midnight. Temples, baths, or halls,
Pronounce who can; for all that learning reaped
From her research, hath been—that these are walls!
Behold the Imperial Mount! 'tis thus the mighty falls!"

As their principal desire was to see the beautiful frescoes that decorate the three chapels built by St. Gregory, and standing apart from the church and from each other, in the garden, they now entered the first which is dedicated to St. Silvia, the mother of the saint.

Mercedes was enchanted with the beauty of the angels with which Guido has decorated the ceiling above the altar.

“Look,” she exclaimed eagerly to Julian, “at the loveliness of these angelic beings! I believe that every one before and since the time of Icarus has felt a desire to become possessed of the power of flight, (I suppose that they might flee away and be at rest) but I never felt it so strongly as at this moment. If I can ever meet with an ingenious artist who is willing to make an attempt to gratify my wish, I shall beg him to come hither to study these exquisite examples of what wings ought to be.”

On proceeding to the second chapel, the terrible solemnity of the subjects there portrayed, and the sublimity with which they were expressed, checked the gaiety which Mercedes had hitherto felt. As she stood before those wonderful productions of rival genius spurred on by immediate emulation, the pictures of Guido and of Domenichino, representing the Flagellation and the Crucifixion of St. Andrew, she felt silenced and awed by the thoughts naturally excited by a contemplation of the almost living representation of the holy Apostle's sufferings, and she drew nearer to Julian, not disposed to speak herself, but willing to hear the remarks of one whose sentiments always harmonized with her own.

As they neither of them spoke, Lord Sylvester broke silence by saying :

“Well, Miss Ratcliffe, have you decided as to the respective merits of the two rivals? Which of these pictures do you prefer?”

“ I am lost in admiration of both,” replied Mercedes, starting; “ indeed, I had almost forgotten that they were pictures; at least, I was not thinking of their merits as paintings at the moment you spoke.”

“ Look,” said Julian, who had listened to her, pointing to Guido’s picture of the procession of the Saint to the place of his Crucifixion; “ look, I entreat you, for a moment on the countenance of this woman who is seated on the ground. If she be not already a convert, she will be one. The expression of her face declares more forcibly than words, that these brutal acts of cruelty are ill-calculated to exterminate, or even to check the progress of the opinions of those on whom they are perpetrated. She gazes on the saint with the most lively pity, and the most earnest desire to see whether he will endure to the end. What an air of lofty indignation does her whole figure and attitude express! If she were not a feeble woman she would spring to her feet, and contend with the fierce soldiers who are violating the reverence which they owe to that grey-haired old man, when dragging him onward to destruction.”

“ Now,” said Julian after a brief pause, for he saw that the rest of the party were hurrying on, “ let us turn and look at the spectators that Domenichino has introduced into his representation of the previous Flagellation of the Saint. Do you see this young child clinging to his mother in

a very agony of terror ? The scene of horror that he is witnessing is incomprehensible, but most terrible to him ; yet, a strange fascination incapacitates him from turning away his eyes from it. Perhaps it is that the mild and heavenly countenance of that suffering old man endears him to that tender infant heart, and his interest is as fully awakened as his fear, which is soothed by the presence and protection of his mother. Perhaps at this moment the seed of future martyrdom is being sown in his breast, and in this scene of bloodshed is being trained a soldier who shall combat for, and win an imperishable crown."

Such were the remarks that Julian's enthusiasm would lead him to pour forth ; but whenever uttered, it was in a manner so wholly unobtrusive, that those who valued them were forced to be on the watch to catch them as they fell from his lips. Mercedes was well content to pay this tribute, but she left him now, for she had already outstayed her companions.

The following day Julian went to the Vatican, and on his entrance into the first gallery he found Lord and Lady Sylvester, Mercedes, and several more waiting for admission into the library. He stopped as he past, and received an invitation to be of their party. On entering, they were charmed by the first *coup d'œil* of the magnificence and vastness of the saloon, the extreme freshness of the paintings which decorated the walls, and the fine vista formed by the long gal-

leries that ran from right and from left, to the uninterrupted length of four hundred feet. The noble granite tables supported by bronze figures of excellent workmanship ; the beautiful china, the classic vases of Greece and Etruria, and the rare curiosities that were displayed to them, all excited their admiration ; they surveyed with some interest the fresco painting of Zuccari, covering the pilasters that divide the room and the arches over the windows, which are both equal in number. Nothing can be more rich than this profusion of brilliant colouring thus bestowed, and the subjects of which the pictures are composed they found not uninteresting. Among them were all the most celebrated libraries of past times, and over the door by which they entered was a painting representing Sixtus V. receiving the plan of the present library from Fontana.

“This is really the most beautiful, the gayest looking room I ever entered,” exclaimed Mercedes ; “it would be quite impossible to study here. All these bright colours, and graceful, fantastic ornaments would distract the attention of the most serious book-worm. Nor is it at all satisfactory to see no books. The sight of them disposes the mind to study ; nothing inspires the desire so strongly as to find yourself surrounded by venerable folios that look so profoundly wise, and as if quite confident that they could, if properly appealed to, and treated with due reverence, reveal many deep secrets well

worth obtaining at any cost of time and trouble. I always long to begin forthwith, to seat myself on the ground before them, and by gentle means induce them to leave their ancient station, and to permit me to dislodge their long established dust, that in itself demands respect. Then, in spite of their groans and the many mysterious noises uttered around, which might well be supposed to indicate displeasure at the disturbance occasioned by an audacious hand, I would persuade them to allow me to acquaint myself, in some slight measure at least, with

The close pressed leaves unclosed for many an age,
The dull red edging of the well filled page,
On the broad back the stubborn ridges rolled
Where yet the title stands in tarnished gold.

Do you not feel," she continued, addressing Julian who was near her, "when in a library, that nothing would so certainly ensure the happiness and peace of your existence as to become really devoted to such pursuits? I have this conviction so strongly that I always entertain a vague hope that I may be left behind while reading the titles of my future friends, locked up and forgotten. But not here," she added, laughingly, "I don't wish to be forgotten here."

"Some one has said, and very wisely you will think, Miss Ratcliffe, if such be your feelings," replied Julian, "were I to pray for a taste which should stand me instead under every variety of circumstance, and be a source of happiness and

of cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against all its ills, however things might go amiss, it should be a taste for reading.”*

“And do you agree in this declaration?” asked Mercedes. “You would not exchange your own taste, and accept this in preference?”

“Perhaps not,” replied Julian, with a smile; “but still I doubt not which of the two would confer the greatest peace: that which is least ambitious; for believe me, ambition is one of those feelings ‘*qui troublent singulièrement la vie.*’”

“But you,” returned Mercedes, with a look of thoughtfulness, “never would be unambitious, apply your mind as you would; you would not be able to read unambitiously. Genius has a *besoin de créer* which renders it restless.”

So many thoughts occurred to each of them on the subjection which they had fallen, that they felt it useless to attempt to pursue it, and were content to turn their attention to things around them. As they walked through the rooms, they paused to remark the plan of Michel Angelo, for the façade of St. Peter’s, which is preserved in one of the paintings on the wall, and to regret that it had not been preferred to the one adopted; and observed with curiosity the representation of Fontana’s machine for the erection of the obelisk that stands in the Piazza.

Julian failed not to lead their attention to the ceiling which is painted by Guido representing the deeds of Samson; and as they gazed up at it, in that

* Macintosh.

painful admiration which a finely painted ceiling always exacts, Lord Sylvester said to them :

“How much the painter’s representation and the poet’s description of this redoubtable hero agree. Do you not immediately think of Milton’s lines portraying

The heroic, the renowned
Irresistible Samson ? whom unarmed
No strength of man or fiercest wild beast could withstand ;
Who tore the lion, as the lion tears the kid ;
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron ;
And, weaponless himself,
Made arms ridiculous—

And here he is when he

By main force pulled up, and on his shoulders bore
The gates of Azza, post, and massy bar,
Up to the hill by Hebron, seat of giants old,
No journey of a sabbath-day, and loaded so,
Like whom the Gentiles fain to bear up Heaven.

One might suppose that the poet or the painter designed in their different languages to speak the thoughts of the other.”

Of course our party did not quit these apartments without surveying the celebrated Nozze Aldobrandini which are now preserved there.

CHAPTER XXII.

Internal powers
Active and strong, and feelingly alive
To each fine impulse.

These, nor gems, nor stores of gold,
Nor purple state, nor culture can bestow ;
But God alone when first His active hand
Imprints the secret bias of the soul.

AKENSIDE.

You are a painter ; one of many fancies :
You can call up past deeds, and make them live
On the blank canvass. COLERIDGE.

THE next day while Mercedes was sitting to Julian for her picture, she asked him if he had not been interested by Lord Sylvester's reference to the harmony existing between poets and painters.

"It has made me," she said, "think a great deal of the affinity between the two, and re-echo Wordsworth's words ; in doing which, my mind has literally acted the part of an echo, repeating the sound only, without reference to the sense ; for with that, I do not entirely agree. The idea of the existence of 'an inglorious Milton' has been always inconceivable to me. I do not credit it. But I do believe that

Many are the Poets that are sown
By Nature ; men endowed with highest gifts,
The vision and the faculty divine ;
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse.

Poetry has been defined,—and is not the definition satisfactory as ‘the language of the imagination and the passions?’ These can speak, oh, how audibly! through the medium of painting and music, as well as verse. In fact, words, pictures, and music are the three instruments of giving expression to poetry. A poet may choose which of the three he will prefer, and whoever successfully employs either, is a poet. Will you agree with me in this?”

“Yes,” replied Julian, and Mercedes went on:

“There will be much difference of opinion as to which of these instruments is most powerful, and best adapted to give utterance to the conceptions of the poet. Here physical causes will probably decide individuals in their choice: such as the gift of a fine ear for music, a fine eye for colour: those who are thus naturally qualified to attain excellence by the one means, may be quite unable to reach it by the others; and though a painter, a musician, a writer of verses may be equally great poets, they may be unable to rival each other in their different branches.”

“Do not, for the glory of Italy,” said Julian, “pass over in silence the fact that some of her children have been gifted with the requisites for excellence in all. Do not forget the incomparable talents of Leonardo da Vinci, throwing into the shade all the half authenticated tales of the Admirable Crichton; nor the offspring of the pens of Michel Angelo, and of Salvator Rosa, as worthy to live, as those of their chisel and their brush. I

would also entreat you to observe, for the credit of my art, that those men who presented such a rare combination of talents, and thus successfully invaded a rival territory, were all *par excellence* painters."

"True," answered Mercedes; "but I am about to give utterance to an opinion which I fear you will not pardon me for entertaining; and yet the very argument by which I see you intend to prove a contrary one, seems to me to give confirmation to mine. With regard to the merits of these instruments, surely one, that of words, possesses powers incontestably greatest, and he who alive to this truth, ventures to grasp them in the belief that he will not be crushed by them, but will be able to subject them to his purpose, proves that he has a more comprehensive intellect, a vaster, and more vigorous genius than those who are content with the qualities possessed by the others.

"It seems to me, that to him the universe offers all its treasures; to the others it imparts some precious gifts, but does not lay open all its stores, knowing that they could not bear them away. For is not this remark perfectly true? 'That there is no thought nor feeling that can enter into the mind of man, that he can be eager to communicate to others, and that they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry?' Yet you cannot hesitate to allow that the poet-painter, and the poet-musician must have many thoughts and feelings which he knows it to be impossible to develope

by means of his art. And does not your remark contain a confession that painters of a peculiarly elevated mind have been forced to have recourse to words, while those who had already chosen them as the vehicles of their thoughts, felt no need to seek the aid of pictures to give them an adequate expression ?

“These ideas are strengthened in me by the circumstance, that one day, after reading a favourite passage in Dante, I turned over Flaxman’s most exquisite illustrations of the *Divina Commedia*, and found that he had made no attempt to embody it. I should like very much to read to you the lines I mean ; not to make a convert of you to my opinion, but to give you the pleasure of feeling its beauty. It is not one of the best known passages, nor is it very long. Will you give me the book ; I see it lying on your table. It is one of your chosen companions.”

Julian willingly complied with her request, and she quickly found the lines of which she had spoken. As she read, the accents of her voice, which was one of peculiar sweetness and feeling, brought home all the poet’s meaning to his heart.*

* Maestro, dissì lui, or mi di’ anche :

Questa fortuna di che tu mi tocche,

Che è, che i ben del mondo ha sì tra branche ?

E quegli a me : O creature sciocche,

Quanta ignoranza è quella che v’ offende !

Or vo’ che tu mia sentenza ne’ mbocche. [Colui

“I have always,” said Mercedes, looking up from the book which she still held open in her hand, “thought this personification of Fortune so touchingly beautiful, and so impossible to be expressed but by these words of the poet! How different is this Christian poet’s conception of her to that of the heathen: how sublime and how consolatory is it, while theirs would only give birth to the apathy of the fatalist and the stoic. Dante has painted a creature armed with great and irresistible power, but yet inspiring trust and con-

Colui lo saver tutto trascende,
 Fece li cieli, e diè lor chi conduce,
 Sì ch’ogni parte ad ogni parte splende,
 Distribuendo egualmente la luce :
 Similmente agli splendor mondani
 Ordinò general ministra e duce,
 Che permutasse a tempo li ben vani,
 Di gente in gente, e d’ uno in altro sangue,
 Oltre la difension de’ senni umani :
 Perch’una gente impera e l’ altra langue,
 Seguendo lo giudicio di costei,
 Ched è occulto com’ in erba langue.
 Vostro saver non ha contrasto a lei :
 Ella provvede, giudica, e persegue
 Suo regno, come il loro gli altri Dei.
 Le sue permutazion non hanno triegue :
 Necessità la fa esser veloce ;
 Sì spesso bien chi vicenda consegue—
 Quest’ è colei ch’ è tanto posta in croce
 Pur da color che le dovrian dar lode,
 Dandole biasmo a torto e mala voce.
 Ma ella s’ è beata, e ciò non ode :
 Con l’ altre prime creature lieta
 Volve sua spera, e beata si gode.”

fidence rather than terror, through our knowledge that she is actuated by

A pure submission to the ruling mind.

She is represented as deaf to our cries and our deprecations, as we well know her to be ; for how many would reverse her decrees were it possible to wrest her authority from her hand. But even this circumstance gives us a very different impression of her to that made by the recklessness of the blind goddess of heathen mythology. The one appears inflexible in the performance of the behests of the Most High ; the other insensible of, and indifferent to human sufferings, of which she makes an idle game. And when the poet goes on to describe the imperturbable joy with which she fulfils her task, he gives her, I think, one of the most signal characteristics of a heavenly creature. How difficult it is to our inferior natures to persist with unruffled serenity in the execution of what we know to be our duty, if beset by those who reprove, who upbraid, who threaten, who implore. This description of her untroubled peace in doing the will of Him who appoints her task, seems to me to give us a glimpse of Heaven, and to reveal to us, as it were, something of the nature of its promised joys."

While Mercedes spoke, her countenance wore an expression of the fervent hope of the looking on of the believer to the bliss to come. Julian regarded it in silent emotion, which rendered him unable for awhile to reply.

When he spoke, he said :

“Of what you say, I feel and acknowledge the truth; but let me speak to you of a delight alike enjoyed by poet, painter, and musician; by the latter, perhaps, in the highest degree for a time, but only for a time; for him it is not enduring, and can any thing deteriorate a pleasure so much as the sense of its evanescence? I allude to the power of awakening sympathy with feelings such as you express. Do not ordinary men deem themselves happy if they can inspire their own sentiments in the bosoms of a few of those who encircle them? If the intimate feelings of their hearts meet with a response in the eyes that read them, if the thoughts of their minds are comprehended by a few of those who witness their development? Is it not universally declared to be the greatest ingredient of happiness to find ‘thought, feeling, taste, harmonious to our own?’ Is not this truest source of bliss more open, and deeper, and wider for the poet and the painter than for any other human beings, even than for any other of the children of genius? Will not their imperishable works prove a link to unite them, not only to the few who love and know them in life, to whom their visible presence is dear—but bind them indissolubly to every heart and soul that share their aspirations after perfection, that can understand their pure and noble conceptions, that melt with the same tenderness, glow with the same ardour? Did not Raphael feel, when he embodied all that is mild and pure, gracious and excellent, spiritual and

devout, in his representation of the Virgin Mother;— did he not know that he was then speaking in an audible voice to all among those who in every age flock to render homage to his matchless works, who had hearts to feel, and minds to conceive the purity and beauty of the character of her who was Blessed among women? Was he not assured that he could not fail to engage the sympathy, to awaken the gratitude, to win the love of all such, whenever this, the work of his hand, the creation of his mind, should meet their eyes?”

“Do you think,” asked Mercedes, who heard him with interest, “that those who are endowed with these great gifts of genius, are of all men the happiest?”

“Alas, no!” replied Julian; “that delicacy of feeling and liveliness of imagination which they necessarily possess destroy their peace.

More wounds than nature gives they know.

I believe in the assertion that ‘*le poète a une malédiction sur sa vie, et une bénédiction sur son nom.*’ And yet who would not desire their vocation?”

“Who, indeed!” repeated Mercedes; and thoughtfulness overspread both their countenances.

CHAPTER XXIII.

You lay out too much pains for purchasing but trouble.

CYMBELINE.

THE fame of Wilmot's picture, as it approached completion, spread through all circles, and the general curiosity to see it was heightened by the interest with which Miss Ratcliffe's beauty invested it. Every one flocked to the young painter's studio ; Lady Sylvester and even Wentworth were gratified by the celebrity their young companion thus acquired, and Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's supremacy in respect to beauty was no longer undisputed.

Neither Julian nor Mercedes derived unmixed pleasure from this triumphant success. The notoriety that followed it was distressing to the retiring modesty of the latter, though she consoled herself by the reflection that the penalty she thus paid was advantageous to the young artist ; and Julian, while it afforded him some pleasure that the first work of his that had challenged universal attention, should be the portrait of her he loved, still shrank from beholding her beauty scrutinized by other eyes.

Soon after his picture became the common topic of conversation, Julian, at an assembly in which

were congregated all those who throughout the season had met together on such occasions, found himself in the vicinity of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, whom he was led particularly to observe, by perceiving that, after looking around with an air of haughty unconcern she fixed her eyes with a stare of scrutiny on Miss Ratcliffe. Her stedfast gaze seemed meant to declare that she was in vain attempting to discover the cause of the admiration that was so generally avowed for her; and the look of contemptuous indifference which she at the same time wore, Julian easily guessed to be assumed in order to conceal the inward mortification which this prolonged survey of her youthful rival's unfaded charms could scarcely fail to excite.

To his great surprise, he saw the haughty beauty at length turn from Mercedes to himself, and then speak a few words to Wentworth, who was in possession of his usual station at her side. He advanced, but with an evident look of displeasure, and approaching him took his arm, saying with an abruptness that showed how little he considered him:

"Come with me, Wilmot, for Mrs. Annesly Marchmont has sent for you. The fame of your skill has reached her ears and she desires to have you presented to her."

Julian, equally displeased with Arundel's manner, and averse to the lady, would willingly have refused compliance; but knowing such a proceeding to be

too glaring a dereliction of politeness to be practicable, he allowed Wentworth to conduct him to her. After the introduction had taken place, he stood in silence beside her, until she should choose to confer the further honour upon him of addressing him. The haughty lady merely interpreted the painter's taciturnity as the natural effect of timid confusion, inspired by the notice she had already bestowed on him ; and now with one of her blandest smiles, such as was rarely lavished on any who desired them, being reserved rather to rivet chains that were on the point of breaking, or to gild them for those who seemed unwilling to endure their weight, she began to speak in a voice 'musical as is Apollo's lyre.'

"Mr. Wilmot, may I have permission to visit your studio ? I am most impatient to view works so universally admired ; but I feel scarcely authorized to intrude on hours so well employed merely for the gratification of an ignorant curiosity. Had I the power of offering those valuable remarks which you must often gather from such a *dilettante* as Lord Sylvester, I might flatter myself that my visits would be desired ; but I fear that you reap only vexation from the crowd of idlers who flock around you, prodigal of admiration, which has been taught them by the initiated, rather than inspired by what they see with their own eyes. Half the spontaneous praises which they utter are rendered as much to the pretty face which has happened to form your subject, as to the rare

talent which you have displayed in the execution of it."

Julian smiled, and venturing to interrupt the lady for a moment, replied :

"In this they show excellent judgment. I certainly do not yet presume to suppose that I equal the beauties of nature."

Mrs. Annesly Marchmont did not appear to listen to this remark, but continued with increasing sweetness :

"All your countrymen owe you much gratitude, Mr. Wilmot, for it is very delightful to see an Englishman bear away the laurels which these vain Italians would arrogate the sole right to wear. You must surely feel great pleasure in thus giving us a right to be proud of you."

To this ingenious compliment Julian could only reply by a bow. The further favours which Mrs. Annesly Marchmont intended to confer upon him were quite beyond his anticipation ; and she was prepared to find him, when made acquainted with them, unable to express his gratitude in any adequate terms. With an appearance of humility and much *empressement*, she again entreated him to tell her when she might come to see his paintings.

"Not only this portrait," she said in a tone that was meant to incite the painter to think that his other works were unjustly cast into the shade by the notice which it attracted to itself, "but all on which you have been employed during

the winter. I have heard of many other productions that more than equally demand admiration." (Unfortunately she did not know any one of which she could speak.) "Portrait painting," she continued, retreating from that part of the subject which she knew not how to enter on successfully, "commands such extensive patronage in England, that of course the attainment of extraordinary excellence in it would meet with such readiness of encouragement that would dispose you to pursue it."

Julian replied, as she paused for a moment :

"Pardon me, I do not think that I shall ever practise it again; except it were to preserve for myself a memorial of a friend, or to gratify the wishes of one. I shall never pursue a branch of my art which is so little qualified to accomplish the wishes I entertain."

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, with a smile, not at all allowing this declaration to interfere with her design. "Your ambition then soars high; so it ought—especially in undisappointed youth. But once more must your skill be employed on a very unworthy subject. You will not refuse me the request I am about to make. You will consent to paint my portrait before you abandon the occupation for ever?"

And as she asked this question, her countenance told how much she expected the painter to be elated; how little she feared that she could be refused. But Julian, though taken by surprise, and now first enlightened as to the purpose of all the

lady's fair speeches, was not long at a loss how to reply.

"To refuse a request," he said respectfully, "is always painful; but the pain may be greatly lessened by the knowledge that the refusal inflicts no injury, but indeed quite the contrary. A young and almost obscure artist, such as I am, cannot feel sufficiently grateful for the unsolicited offer of patronage from one whose notice confers fame, as in the circle of society here Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's could not fail to do; but my sense of the fact that I as little deserve such distinction as I have ventured to seek it, makes me aware that the only line of conduct which it becomes me to follow, is at once most respectfully to decline it. Miss Ratcliffe's father has long been the friend of my family, and my most munificent benefactor. As a slight token of gratitude I offer him this picture, and am aware that imperfections in it will be leniently regarded by him, when he considers it as the work of my hand. I have not the same claims to the indulgence of others; and my only desire is to convince Mrs. Annesly Marchmont as fully as I am myself convinced, that if she would possess a picture at all worthy of herself, there are many other studios in Rome in which she can be far better gratified."

Mrs. Annesly Marchmont listened to the commencement of this speech with polite attention. She expected the young painter to be overpowered at the first contemplation of the task proposed to

him, and modestly to disclaim his power to perform it. But the length of Julian's answer rendered her rather impatient, and the quiet firmness of his manner seemed so unlike the effect of timid irresolution that she began to listen with doubt, though still with incredulity. When she replied, it was with scarcely an attempt to conceal her haughty displeasure.

"I might admire the humility of your speech, Mr. Wilmot, but that it leads me to infer that you doubt my capacity to select for myself the person best calculated to execute my wishes. Now, do you know," she continued, again relaxing into a smile, "that it seems to me very conceited of you to think your generally acknowledged fame undeserved?"

"Believe me," returned Julian, "it is as you yourself judiciously pointed out. In this instance half the praise that I have won was in reality owing to the remarkable beauty of my subject."

Mrs. Annesly Marchmont at this reply bit her lips, and looked more angry than before; she answered drily:—

"I do not remember to have made the judicious remark that you attribute to me. It sounds to me more like one of Lord Sylvester's *critiques*."

She paused, and Julian was in hopes that she would now permit him to retreat; to both it was perceptible that their lengthened conversation had excited observation and curiosity, and Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, feeling not quite sure whether the

painter was in earnest, or merely displaying a mock humility ; but certainly not pleased with the manner in which he had received her flattering intelligence, and anxious above all things that, if she failed, her attempt should remain unknown, resolved no longer to prolong the discourse, and saying :

“To-morrow you may expect a visit from me, and we will then settle all preliminaries,” dismissed him with a bow. Before he could proffer any reply, she was engaged a-fresh in conversation, and Julian moved unreluctantly away ; though conscious of the meaning of her last words, he had no dread of being beguiled of his resolution by any of the lady’s artifices. He felt that no inducement could tempt him to employ his pencil in the service of Mercedes’ rival, to whom he had an aversion so lively, that he knew that he had been but honest in declaring that he could never execute a portrait of her, which it would give her any pleasure to possess.

“What !” said Lord Sylvester as he passed him in the crowd, “are you too gone over to the enemy ? *Et tu, Brute ?*”

Julian started, for he had not observed his friend.

“Indeed,” he replied, seeing him desirous to pause, and listen to an explanation of the circumstance which had excited his curiosity, “an unwilling obedience to a peremptory summons can hardly be construed into an act of treason.”

“Have you really been thus highly favoured ? Wentworth, I suppose, is so charmed with your

last attempt that he deems you worthy of the highest patronage, for he it was who conducted you to the feet of the supreme arbitress of fashion."

"I was not only thus highly favoured, but much more highly favoured. Some, you know, have honour thrust upon them; in this case neither deserved, nor desired. What should you think of so proud a beauty requesting me to paint her portrait?"

"What! that she might in all things rival my mother's fair *protégée*! When are you to commence this formidable undertaking?"

"Never."

"Do you mean that you refused acquiescence?" demanded Lord Sylvester in a tone of pleasure.

"Yes," answered Julian drily.

"You have, upon my word, been very rash and very daring."

"Why so? I am not a portrait painter; Raymond is. I have told you already my reasons for willingly undertaking Miss Ratcliffe's picture, but in this instance, I am uninfluenced by any similar motives."

"You must be aware that you are throwing away great means of coming forward into notice. You are, in fact, acting with your usual imprudence," said Lord Sylvester, ironically.

"Be it so," replied Julian with a smile, "and as usual I must withstand your friendly admonitions."

Julian saw plainly that Lord Sylvester felt a

satisfaction at his conduct which he was scarcely at the pains to conceal. He had a secret conviction that to Mercedes it would not be less pleasing, and he now looked around to see where she was, and how occupied. He had observed of late that her vivacity was frequently interrupted by seasons of thoughtful silence, which seemed to him occasioned by some secret uneasiness. These passing clouds cast a shade over her youthful joyousness. The chill they imparted to the warmth of her sunny smiles was perhaps scarcely felt by those who enjoyed only a trifling pleasure when basking in their beams; but to Julian this gloom was perceptible, however transitory: eager to ascertain its cause, he watched her narrowly, and as tenderly as a mother could watch a drooping child; and earnestly did he wish that his mother could be by her, to win from her the cause of her despondency, and remove her care by timely counsels. To-night she appeared to be more depressed than he had ever seen her before, and he could not be satisfied without making an attempt to speak to her. Having at last succeeded in gaining her side, he said in a low voice:

“You are not well this evening, Miss Ratcliffe, I fear.”

“Why do you say so?” she replied starting.

“You have pressed your hand to your forehead so many times. Besides you must remember that I am now so well acquainted with your countenance that I can see every change in it.”

"Indeed ! I shall always turn away from you if that be the case," answered Mercedes with a smile.

Almost fearful of giving offence, Julian hesitated, but could not refrain from adding in an earnest voice :

"There are then changes, Miss Ratcliffe, which even you would disguise ? Pardon me," he said hastily, seeing that his rash inquiry caused Mercedes to change colour, and that she paused as if unable to reply ; but she immediately regained her composure and answered, not without a tinge of melancholy :

"People expect much more vivacity from me than I possess. If I am serious, they always seem to think me sad."

"You used to be rarely serious ; at least, on such occasions as these," said Julian. "None were so gay."

"Yes," replied Mercedes ; "I am gay and yet sometimes sad too. '*Il est bien difficile de n'être pas sérieux au fond, si ce fond n'est pas, comme dans quelques gens, à la superficie.*' Perhaps," she added laughing, "many do me the injustice to suppose that such is the case with me, and that, therefore, I never ought to be serious."

Then changing the subject suddenly and trying to speak with an air of carelessness, Mercedes said :

"I see that you also are acquainted with Mrs. Annesly Marchmont. I saw you talk to her for some time. Tell me, is her conversation so brilliant, her manner so fascinating as they are said to be ?"

Why did Mercedes make this inquiry so earnestly in spite of herself? Did she alike discern and dread the influence of her rival's charms on Arundel's heart? As this suspicion passed through Julian's breast, it caused him a bitter pang; but he was willing on any terms to convey pleasure to Mercedes, and he answered promptly:

"I do not discover in what her attractions lie, for there is an affectation in all she does; an appearance of dissimulation in all she says; and in the sweetest of her smiles, there lurks a haughtiness, that disfigures even her beautiful face. I never was addressed by her before this evening, and she sent for me to ask to see your picture to-morrow."

"And did you consent?" inquired Mercedes, almost as if she hoped that he had refused.

"I could not decline her proposed visit to my studio," replied Julian; "but I did refuse her next request, which was to paint her portrait."

Mercedes did not speak, but her face beamed with satisfaction; then, as if with self-reproach, she exclaimed:

"Oh! Mr. Wilmot, why did you do so?" (though Mercedes asked this question, she felt why Julian had refused; he regarded with indignation the woman who sought to injure her). "You will make her your enemy!"

She spoke as if she dreaded her enmity.

"Scarcely, I should think," replied Julian, "and if she be, how can she injure me?"

"I should not like to know that she was so," said Mercedes thoughtfully.

"If she take offence, I cannot help it ; I cannot act differently," and then Wilmot repeated all that he had said to Mrs. Annesly Marchmont ; but Mercedes shook her head, and looked still alarmed.

"I would not, if I were you, make public her request, nor your refusal. Do not add to it useless provocation."

"Indeed this caution, for which I thank you, was needless. I am not vain enough, Miss Ratcliffe, to wish to boast of her proffered patronage."

Julian left Mercedes to find Lord Sylvester, and to ask him not to repeat the communication which he had made to him. Lord Sylvester laughed, and congratulated him on this acquisition of prudence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Harm not yourself with your vexation. I
Am senseless of your wrath ; a touch more rare
Subdues—all fears.

CYMBELINE.

THE following morning Mrs. Annesly Marchmont drove to Wilmot's studio, impatient to ascertain if he could really dare to provoke her wrath by persisting in his refusal, or whether his refusal had never been seriously given ; but this she could not bring herself to think, though she wished to do so. However, discarding her secret misgivings, she entered the room armed with an air of undoubting assurance of success, and prepared to lavish as many more praises on the artist as she thought would ensure his acquiescence in her wishes. Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, could she have felt more secure on the score of Julian's final obedience to her commands, would, (knowing that such a proceeding could not but be peculiarly galling to Lady Sylvester and wounding to Miss Ratcliffe,) have insisted on Wentworth's attendance on this occasion. But as it was, she preferred going alone, and therefore forbid his presence, taking care to do so in a manner that made the relinquishment of it appear to him an act of merit, and rendered him more than ever

disposed to condemn his mother's unjustifiable animadversions on the conduct of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont in general, and towards himself in particular.

Julian, with unofficious politeness, displayed to his visitor those paintings which he usually exhibited to strangers with whose pretensions to taste and judgment he was unacquainted. The portrait of Mercedes he would have kept veiled from her envious gaze, if he could; but of course this was impossible. It was the object of her visit, and it was only her unwillingness to mortify the artist, that induced her to give any consideration to the other productions of his pencil. After a close scrutiny of Miss Ratcliffe's picture and the most lavish commendations of its excellence, she recurred to the request which she had made the preceding evening.

"I am more than ever bent on obtaining my wish; nor can you venture, Mr. Wilmot, with such a witness as that against you, to repeat the very pretty and proper professions of inability to which you forced me to listen last night," she said, pointing with a smile to Mercedes' portrait.

Julian bowed to her compliment, but respectfully repeated in language which admitted of no further misconstruction of his meaning, that he was still compelled to decline the honour proposed to him.

"Unfortunately," he said, "he had not even the time at his command that was necessary to

authorise any hopes of success, for he was contemplating a journey to Naples as soon as Lent should begin. He still declared his conviction that his refusal would not deprive Mrs. Annesly Marchmont of any thing at all worthy to be in her possession, and he hoped that she would consent to believe in this consolatory truth."

The lady reddened with displeasure, and then turned pale with increasing anger. She felt that she had already compromised her dignity by her eager pursuit of that which was denied her. Command, not supplication, became her lips; but she knew it would be equally unavailing. She rose to depart, and approached the picture to look at it more nearly. Suddenly turning towards the painter, and fixing her brilliant eyes upon him with a look full of threatening, and with a malicious smile she said in a mocking voice, leaving him by her whole demeanour uncertain how far she was in earnest:

"Some would deem this an act of folly and of insolence which ought not to go unpunished. Have you no fear that favour rejected should be ill-will earned? Should not you dread to make me your enemy?"

She stopped as abruptly as she had commenced; she wished to startle, to subdue, to awaken a vague fear in the young painter. Julian heard her with amazement indeed, but with quiet self-possession he replied:

"I will not anticipate so much injustice from

Mrs. Annesly Marchmont as lasting indignation would be ; nor flatter myself that I am of sufficient importance to awaken even a momentary feeling of the kind."

"I have hated what I have also despised before now," replied Mrs. Annesly Marchmont, her beautiful face suddenly disfigured by an expression of concentrated bitterness and anger that filled Julian with disgust, "and a day may come when I may remember your refusal."

She swept past him as she spoke, and reached her carriage before he recovered sufficient self-possession to remember that he ought to have proffered his services in conducting her to it.

To Mercedes, Julian did not repeat this extraordinary conversation. He felt that it would pain her to hear that any woman had behaved in such a manner, even though the woman who disgraced herself by this violence, was her rival. To Lord Sylvester he related her strange words under a promise of secrecy. Lord Sylvester replied, after a short silence, with a dryness of manner peculiar to him when his conviction was complete :

"Depend upon it that she will some day injure you : but it is too late to conciliate now."

To this last remark, Julian cordially agreed. When next he saw Mrs. Annesly Marchmont he was informed that she was about to leave Rome the following day, and she was in consequence surrounded by those whom her departure reduced to despair. Wentworth was present, but he was

more guarded in the expression of his devotion than usual.

Julian, much to his surprise, discovered that in the interval which had elapsed since he had seen them together, Mrs. Annesly Marchmont had made the acquaintance of Mercedes, for when she departed she came to the spot where Miss Ratcliffe stood, and he himself beside her ; and taking her hand, without regarding the reluctance with which it was yielded, said, with a smile that forcibly reminded Julian of the last he had seen on her lips:

“ Farewell, Miss Ratcliffe ; I trust we shall meet again in our travels homeward.”

As she moved on, her dress actually touched him, yet she did not recognize him by word or look.

Mercedes, when she was passed, drawing her breath as if inexpressibly relieved, murmured in a low voice, which, however, reached Julian’s ear :

“ She will be gone to-morrow !”

Julian heard these words with regret, for in her departure he saw the removal of the strongest barrier that existed between Mercedes and Wentworth.

CHAPTER XXV.

To feel for trifles a distracting train
Of hopes and terrors equally in vain.

AKENSIDE.

I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy,
Baited with reasons not unplausible,
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
And hug him into snares.

COMUS.

It was impossible that Julian should continue to meet Miss Ratcliffe in general society without perpetually enduring the pangs of jealous fear, awakened by beholding her surrounded by many entitled to be openly her suitors. He perceived that her beauty, her unaffected vivacity, and noble simplicity of character touched those hearts that were capable of feeling disinterested passion; while the reputation of her wealth attracted every idle fortune hunter, whom the possession of an empty title, or of noble blood, or merely of an arrogance not to be daunted, led to flatter themselves that they also had a right to dispute the prize. While Mrs. Annesly Marchmont was in Rome, Julian frequently heard of and witnessed Arundel's devotion to her; and this he flattered himself was incompatible with any definite engagement with Miss

Ratcliffe. Still he had from the first seen enough to convince him of the desire entertained by Lady Sylvester to effect one, which in one respect made her act (unknowingly of course) as his friend rather than as his enemy. It led her sedulously to watch the advances of that crowd of admirers who caused uneasiness to both alike, and as far as she ventured, to discourage them.

Among those who had lately awakened Julian's suspicions, was a young Irish Baronet, Sir Alfred Rayleigh, who had lately arrived at Rome.

Prepossessing in person and manner, generous and warm-hearted in no common measure, his countenance bespoke the amiability of his disposition, but was little expressive of any brilliant gifts of intellect. Not that he was either a dull or uninteresting companion; he was not destitute of the ready wit, or the frank vivacity of his country; but his ignorance and total want of cultivation of mind were glaringly evident, and the weakness of his character easily discernible. Left without parents at an early age, he had experienced the most careless negligence on the part of one of two guardians. He who had been selected merely as a man of business, conscientiously fulfilled his trust, and restored the property committed to his superintendence, which had been greatly impoverished by the extravagance of its last possessor, to a more flourishing state than it had ever known: while the other, though a personal friend of the father of his young ward, left him to follow his own inclinations, not even counselling

him to go through the general routine of an education suitable to his prospects in life, to which his extreme indolence of mind and vacillating character rendered him averse. His opinions were unformed, and he had a want of confidence in himself which disposed him to lean upon others. Unfortunately, he scarcely possessed sufficient discernment to seek out those, who might have lent a worthy support to his weakness, and there was no want of flatterers ready to undertake the office.

All these faults, and they were his worst, might, however, have been easily pardoned and greatly rectified by the woman to whom he should give his heart; and the generosity of feeling which was sure to characterise his affection whenever bestowed, might invest him with an interest calculated to win the tenderness which he asked in return.

Julian awaited not without dread the effect of the impending discovery of his timid passion on Mercedes. He compared him with Wentworth, and acknowledged that in every brilliant attraction Sir Alfred must yield the palm; yet he felt that he should greatly prefer him as a friend, and was it impossible that Mercedes should accord him the preference as a lover? Starting in dismay at this suggestion, he sought to find consolation in opposite reflections, saying to himself:

“Is it possible that she, with that cultivated taste, that refinement of mind, that ardent love of knowledge, which make her delight in the society

of such a man as Lord Sylvester, and qualify her to share his pursuits—is it possible that she will become for life the inseparable companion of one so tasteless, so uninformed?—Not only ‘with intellect so unreplenished,’ but without the capacity to fill the store-houses of the brain, if any such there be in that head of his?”

As all his anxiety could not hasten the course of events, he was forced to watch their progress with an appearance of unconcern, though eagerly awaiting the crisis which he saw approaching. He was unable to refrain from seizing every opportunity that afforded itself of seeing in society the objects of his interest. Mercedes, in the last of her visits to the painter’s studio, told him that as the moon was at the full, they intended to repair to the Coliseum, and thus to do homage to all its variety of beautiful aspects; having often beheld it burnished by the gorgeous rays of the setting sun, and many times in their morning excursions, seen it illumined by that orb when rising; and had viewed it also in its noontide glory, when the deep blue sky looked more ‘darkly, deeply, beautifully blue’ through its many openings, and the glowing redness of the walls contrasted most forcibly with the verdant freshness of the thousand plants that overrun it. Mercedes as she told him of their intention, went on to repeat with admiration, words which, she said, were to her more truly descriptive of that majestic building than any others she had ever read or heard;

comprising, as they did, all its peculiarities in one sentence.

“As it now stands, the Coliseum is a striking image of Rome itself—decayed, vacant, serious, yet grand;—half grey and half green;—erect on one side, and fallen on the other;—with consecrated ground in its bosom; inhabited by a beadsman, visited by every caste;—for moralists, antiquarians, painters, architects, poets, devotees, all meet here to meditate, to examine, to draw, to measure, and to pray.”

Julian assented to her approval of this sentence, only he pointed out what he thought two defects in it.

“Why,” he asked, “does Forsyth say, ‘vacant, serious, yet grand?’ Where is the opposition indicated by ‘yet?’ And why does he call the Coliseum half grey? A painter may consider himself qualified to criticise the truth of descriptive epithets. I think that in those scenes which Byron has described, he is the only commentator on them, whom I would willingly allow to accompany me. The exquisite propriety of every term he applies, is then remarked with an admiration, that adds to the pleasure of the hour. I will not quote his magnificent passages on the Coliseum, because half your party will have them by heart, and will be bent on finding listeners.

Julian, who had long since ceased to debate whether he should fly from or seek the presence of Mercedes, readily acquiesced in her proposal that he should accompany them, and the appointed

evening found him among the earliest of the expected guests at the Palazzo —. Sir Alfred had, however, preceded him, and Wentworth had preceded them both, and embittered to both the prospects of the evening by the bright smiles which he won from Mercedes. Julian plainly perceived how rapid was his progress towards the attainment of his object, now that he was freed from the baneful influence of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's charms ; and he saw him animated to unusual exertions, and rendered by the presence of a rival, (welcome rather than unwelcome to him), all vivacity, all amiability, and all devotion. When the party assembled in the interior of the Coliseum, Julian was full of anxiety to see whose arm would be first proffered to Mercedes, and whose by her accepted. Oh, that he might be her conductor ! that he might be the sole listener to her expression of thoughts and feelings, which such a scene would call forth !—That he might, in turn, speak to her, unheard by any other human ear, the swelling emotions of his bosom, and tell her how his painter's soul was affected whilst wandering thus in paths that have inspired poets !—In melancholy silence he stood apart, eager to observe for whom that happiness was reserved, which was for him unattainable. He dreaded lest it should be Arundel ; he could not wish that it should be Sir Alfred, for he saw that a declaration of love was trembling on his lips ; he would have been positively happy if it had been Lord Sylvester, for then he might have joined them, and in the interchange of con-

genial sentiments, have enjoyed a temporary respite from his misery.

But Wentworth was resolved to meet with no defeat, and with the rapidity of thought, he obtained possession of Mercedes' arm, with a demonstration of anxiety intended to convince her how much he valued the privilege of being at her side. Julian observed, on looking round to see how his disconsolate rival would bear this disappointment, that Lady Sylvester, manifesting scarcely less decision in her choice, approached the young baronet, and took his arm. Seeing that Lord Sylvester was also engaged, Julian gladly wandered on alone, inexpressibly relieved to find it in his power to do so, and in a few minutes lost sight of all companions. The sublimity of the scene was so great as to force him in some measure to lose himself in the meditations it so naturally awakened; but this was not the first time that Julian had visited it at the same hour, and under circumstances far more favourable to the indulgence of reveries than the present. It was frequently his habit, on quitting a heated ball-room, or when weary of the solitude of his own chamber, to drive to this spot, and obtaining admission by a fee to the *Custode*, to wander for hours alone over its ruins, not unfrequently endangered by an unseen approach to the verge of its yawning chasms, and impressed to a painful degree, with the sense of its magnitude, its gloom, and its utter destitution of former glory.

Most forcibly did Julian feel how truly this

mighty ruin may be considered as the type of Rome herself. His imagination, recalling the past, would see in that vast and magnificent theatre, wherein were enacted scenes of sanguinary cruelty, and fiercest carnage, a fit image of the palmy days when Rome sent forth proud conquerors, who returned with laurels dropping with the blood of slaughtered people, and dyed them deeper still in that of her citizens. Then would he picture Christian martyrs expiring on that dread arena, but in the hour that seemed to speak despair to the hearts of all of their abhorred race, sowing the good seed in a fertile soil, and watering it with their blood, though heathens sat around despising and exulting. This he compared to the time when Rome, yet uncorrupted by prosperity, and yet awaiting the removal of her enemies mightier than herself, was in truth a labourer in the vineyard of her Lord. And when he cast a glance on the marks of paltry superstitions and vain delusions, that now provoke the indignation or the derision of the moralist who passes by them, he saw Rome, as she is, fallen indeed !

But all were not equally employed in moralising. There were many no less engrossed on that evening by their own petty pursuits and interests, vanities and affectations, than if they had been in a scene devoid of all interest, and of all power of awakening a thought that was not of the present. There were others, who would have despised these triflers, no less abstracted from the outward scene, by the

eager pursuit of their own designs and machinations. Among these was Lady Sylvester. She had not proceeded far with her young companion, when she began to address him in those silvery tones of sweetness so peculiarly her own.

"You are not aware, Sir Alfred," she said, "that I was formerly one of your mother's most familiar friends. How much was I reminded of her when first I saw you! How all my friend came back before me! A painful pleasure!—You do not know yet, but you will know, for yours is a feeling heart, how tender are the friendships of youth, how potent the spell they fling over our latest years! It is the love of her memory that makes me speak to you now in so sad a strain. Affection for her, and," she paused and then uttered in a voice at once so gentle, and so earnest, "and pity for you."

Her companion started, and by a slight impulse of her arm, she induced him to stop.

"Nay, do not start, either in surprise, or in dismay. If such my interest in you, is it strange that *I* should have read emotions which you are too ingenuous to know how to conceal? Does it alarm you to find them in my possession?" Scarcely pausing for a reply, she continued: "Miss Ratcliffe's beauty has charmed you; your heart yields to the irresistible fascination of her society. I am now about to do for you what I would do for no other: to save you from your danger, by making known to you a secret, which, for reasons of no

small importance, I assure you I have hitherto, and must continue to keep inviolate—this is, my son's engagement to Miss Ratcliffe."

Her victim started back from her as she said these words, and leaning against a broken wall covered his face with his hands and muttered :

"Is it even so? I anticipated this."

Lady Sylvester approached him, and as if distressed by the sight of his emotion laid her hand tenderly on his arm, and added :

"I counsel you, dear Sir Alfred, to fly—now while there is time, and seek in other scenes the restoration of your peace of mind."

"I will—I will;" said Sir Alfred, "I will go to Naples, instantly."

At this moment a deep sigh reached their ears; they both started, and Lady Sylvester looked around with so guilty a face of fear as would have excited suspicion in any one less guileless than he on whom she was practising. Quickly recovering herself, she seized the young Baronet's arm, and whispered :

"Hush! we are overheard."

And then drew him into the light to discover the intruder. On the other side of the ruined arch, emerging from the shade which might have concealed him from their view, they found Julian, his cheek more blanched, his demeanour more agitated than that of Lady Sylvester's companion. Unsuspicious of the cause, almost indifferent as to whether her words had reached his ear or not,

and inexpressibly relieved to see that he was alone, she exclaimed :

“ Ah ! Mr. Wilmot, you have escaped into solitude I see. Who knows what delightful reveries we have disturbed ; what images we have destroyed, perhaps banished for ever, so that they will never now be given to the living world. I assure you when we came upon you, there was the painter’s ‘ eye in fine frenzy rolling,’ and your whole attitude was most picturesque and promising.”

Julian’s confusion was not sufficiently interesting to Lady Sylvester, nor exciting to her curiosity to detain her, and she passed on with her first companion, leaving him again in solitude to muse on and to repeat how many times, the few, the very few words of those which he had unavoidably overheard, that had impressed themselves on his memory : “ My son’s engagement to Miss Ratcliffe !”

Lady Sylvester, as they returned to the group of their friends, now collected to depart, whispered to the unhappy Sir Alfred :

“ Do not forget that I have placed myself at your mercy to serve you. Keep my secret till it is publicly known, or till I give you permission to disclose it.”

The young man, believing himself deeply indebted to her, wrung her hand passionately, and muttered :

“ You may depend upon me.”

After that night they saw him no more. Two days had scarcely elapsed when they heard of his

departure for Naples, and Lady Sylvester laughingly acknowledged to Mercedes that she was surprised certainly ; that she had thought that the power of her charms would have detained him longer where he was ; and then she added, tenderly kissing her blushing cheek :

“ I always fancy every one in love with you, *carissima* ; but the young Baronet, though good-looking, and good-natured, was terribly deficient here,” she said, tapping her forehead. “ Not that I ever think any one half so handsome as Arundel.”

Mercedes blushed still more deeply at the unexpected introduction of this name, but Lady Sylvester stopped there.

Now Mercedes was really surprised at Sir Alfred Rayleigh’s sudden departure ; for though she did not fancy every one in love with her, she had fancied that he was. But she did not think very long or very deeply on the subject.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Oimè ! Che mia salute
Sarebbe il disperare,
Poichè sol la speranza
È stata mia rovina !

TASSO.—AMINTA.

It is not that I love you less
Than when before your feet I lay ;
But to prevent the sad increase
Of hopeless love I keep away.
In vain, alas ! for every thing
Which I have known belong to you,
Your form does to my memory bring
And makes my old wounds bleed anew.

WALLER.—THE SELF BANISHED.

FOR days after Julian had become finally convinced that Mercedes had yielded her affections to Wentworth, and that he, though he little prized and was wholly undeserving of them, had resolved to obtain her hand, he carefully abstained from again entering her presence. Instead of seeking, as formerly, he shunned every place where she was likely to be ; he set aside every thing belonging to him, that was in any way connected with her, and vividly brought her to his mind. The drawings she had commended,—the books that he had procured, because he had seen her read them,—the flowers which she had thrown away, and he

had cherished,—above all, those faint sketches of her beauty which he had traced from memory in hours of passionate musing. All these he removed out of his sight.

Up to this time, he had never had any settled conviction forced upon him that her heart was another's. If there were undeniably much in passing circumstances to awaken his fears, there was also much to lull them. Until deprived of this negative kind of security, which, unsanctioned, fed a latent hope, he had been himself ignorant of the greatness of its power to abate the anguish of his wound. The rude shock which he now sustained, wakened him for ever from his dream. It was no longer a pleasure to him to think that he breathed the same air, and dwelt among the same scenes as Mercedes; that they often share the same enjoyments, occupations and thoughts. He would gladly have obliterated from his memory the first day on which he had beheld her. A species of resentment usurped the place of the tenderness with which he had ever thought of her previously. Despair had taken hold of him. He wrestled with his misery, and determined to fly. This resolution caused him to emerge from his self-imposed solitude for the purpose of seeking Lord Sylvester, in order to remind him of his declared intention of quitting Rome for Naples, and to hasten his departure by announcing his own readiness to accompany him there, in compliance with the request which his patron had already made.

Nor were the fears by which Julian was at length besieged, exaggerated or premature. Though Mrs. Annesly Marchmont left Rome, Wentworth remained. If the beauty and the art which had, when present, so enthralled him, yet wanted power to compel him to follow whither they led, still less could they, when absent, blind him to the perception of his true interests, or disincline him to their pursuit. He remembered with shame, what his mother did not neglect to point out with reproach, that he had already allowed the wiles of his fair enchantress to lead him to the brink of ruin, and had under her influence almost effected the destruction of that fabric which had been so carefully erected, and on the stability of which his future fortunes in life depended. Repentance should lead to reformation, and this truth was acknowledged by Arundel with a candour which restored him at once to his mother's favour; particularly as no present temptation existed that could lead him to be more lax in practice than in profession. Arundel was at length an open suitor for Mercedes' hand, and Lady Sylvester obtained from her lips, a hesitating, but not unwilling permission to write to Mr. Ratcliffe, and seek his consent to their future union.

Strange as it may seem, up to this time, Mercedes, in spite of her youth and beauty, and the favour which his mother, more than himself, had won for him in her eyes, had been rather an object of aversion than of love to Wentworth. It is true

that when first he saw her, he was indifferent to all others as well as to herself, but neither his imagination nor his heart were likely to be quickly touched; the fire of the one had been quenched by early intercourse with the world, and the latter was secured by overweening vanity against the admission of any other idol than self into its inmost recess. He was gratified indeed to find her charms such as would excite as much envy as her wealth. Before he saw her, he regarded her merely as a golden prize which his mother's arts were to make his own. But on beholding her, he felt that she had other qualifications of far inferior value in his estimation, but would yet render it more honourable to win her; and with pleasure he prepared to endeavour to outshine his brother in her eyes, and to make her by the charms of his person, manner, and conversation, prefer him to the possessor of a coronet. He came later into the field, and desired the triumph of destroying by his brilliant qualities any hold that his brother's more solid claims to esteem might have gained on her affections. Thus actuated, Arundel would, at that time, had not his mother's caution banished him from the scene of action, almost as soon as he appeared on it, have pursued the object which she wished him to obtain with all the ardour which she desired. Nor would his success have been doubtful or difficult. Mercedes loved Lady Sylvester most tenderly, and had by her been

taught to believe that in Arundel she beheld a son worthy of such a mother's fondest affection. A superficial acquaintance with him, particularly when he was intent on pleasing, was well calculated to make a favourable impression. Lady Sylvester discerned the advantages of their situation, but deemed herself compelled to resign them. She did not dare to weave her web immediately under the eyes of Mr. Ratcliffe. By her prompt banishment of Arundel, she guarded against an evident peril, but encountered another of which she only discovered the existence by feeling its effects. Still she had—

With reason's suffrage on her side,

never been forced wholly to relinquish the guidance of her son's actions into the hands of her enemy. Her influence, though weakened and interrupted, had never been absolutely destroyed, and on the removal of its obstructress had resumed its original strength, and she found at length in Wentworth the willing and able coadjutor who was necessary to carry out her schemes. With Mercedes no very difficult task awaited her. Her first acquaintance with Arundel had sufficed to make her look forward with interest to the period when it was to be renewed. This feeling was carefully fostered by his mother, and had he met her again with the same display of eagerness for her approbation which he had shown in their first meeting, he might quickly have won her heart. But his inde-

cision first perplexed, and then piqued her. She stood aloof with dignified reserve while his declarations were thus ambiguous ; but, as we have already said, Lady Sylvester's artful insinuations would not allow absolute indifference to succeed to astonishment and displeasure. She prevented her from yielding her mind to other subjects, and kept up a doubt and an interest which she now fanned into a more lively flame.

Mercedes, if not positively certain that she loved, was conscious of an accession of happiness in the certainty that she was loved, and in the enjoyment of what Lady Sylvester so readily bestowed—a mother's tenderness. Alternate distrust and belief had banished the peace which her gentle disposition peculiarly needed, and she felt a satisfaction in the present calm which she erroneously attributed to her value for that affection of which she now confidently deemed herself possessed.

Even Lord Sylvester feared that she was becoming really attached to a man whom he considered so unworthy to awake any deep feeling. He had always entertained a hope, if not an expectation that she would not fail to discover, and to estimate at their real value, the true characters of Arundel and his mother. He had even gone so far as more than once to attempt to open her eyes to see all that was passing before them with something of the same clearness that his own did ; but he found that the veil which Lady Sylvester had woven and cast over her unpractised friend was far

too blinding for her sight to pierce. He then hoped that some not unworthy rival would appear to bear away the prize from Arundel; but Lady Sylvester knew how to impede the advances of such, nor did he see any that gained his unqualified approbation except the unhappy young painter, whose wild and visionary passion he did not dare to feed on hopes that he knew could never be realized. There still remained the possibility that Mr. Ratcliffe might absolutely refuse his consent to a union so little advantageous that nothing short of a conviction that his child's happiness was at stake could make him yield it. Lord Sylvester, actuated by feelings of peculiar delicacy, had always carefully abstained from stepping out of his vocation, and arrogating authority over any of the proceedings of his step-mother and her son. This desire had prevented him from revealing to the merchant his knowledge of their characters, though he had not wholly concealed from him his opinion of the dangers to which Mercedes would be exposed when thus entrusted to the care of a woman of fashion. But it was precisely because Lady Sylvester had power to confer the vain distinction of fashion on his child, that Mr. Ratcliffe was deaf to the timely warning.

From the night of their visit to the Coliseum, Lord Sylvester had perceived the change that took place in Julian; he had marked his retreat from society, and on his return to it plainly perceived that his former assumed calmness, and even frequent

appearance of enjoyment, were succeeded by a mood of despairing gloom and restless impatience. Julian did not consider himself authorized to confide his discovery to his friend, having made it by overhearing a conversation not intended to meet his ear; nor was he willing, by the acknowledgment of the effect it had worked on him, to confess the wisdom of all his previous cautions. But the eagerness with which he advocated their immediate departure for Naples, followed as it immediately was by the open declaration of Arundel's suit, revealed to Lord Sylvester what he sought to conceal, and he naturally concluded that the lover's eye had more quickly discovered the signs of approaching danger than his own. Touched with compassion, and seeing how little ground there was for future hope, Lord Sylvester resolved to acquiesce at once with the painter's suggestion, and agreed on an early day for their departure.

So sincere was the interest with which the unprotected youth and ingenuous candour of Miss Ratcliffe inspired him, that he could not refrain before he left her (though to do so was alike repugnant to his inclination, and uncongenial to his character) from laying aside his habitual reserve, and addressing her in a manner which he thought nothing short of his just appreciation of the motives of those by whom she was beset, would have authorized. He sought an opportunity of conversing with her alone, which was not now

so easy to find as it had formerly been, and began by asking her if she had any commands for him or for Mr. Wilmot at Naples.

“No,” she replied; “I hope we shall come there soon ourselves.”

“Not before we shall be on our way to Greece, I fear,” answered Lord Sylvester. “In short, I know not when we shall be likely to meet again, Miss Ratcliffe; probably not until we shall both arrive in England.”

Mercedes remarked that whereas Lord Sylvester had occasionally been used sometimes formerly to call her more familiarly by her name, since the prospect of a more intimate connexion between them, he had never done so, and there was a stiffness in his whole manner towards her, altogether unlike its former frank cordiality.

“The close of a winter like this is rather melancholy,” continued he. “Here are people congregated from all parts of the world forming friendships which it is very improbable that they can continue, for when once they separate now, if they ever meet again at all, it may be under totally different circumstances; and their hearts, instead of warming afresh towards each other, may find very different feelings engendered by the renewal of their interrupted intercourse. Here distinctions of rank are in a measure laid aside and forgotten, and sympathies of taste and character allowed a freer play than in our world of London; and many here are on terms of familiar footing, who there will

scarcely recognize each other. This is a fertile source of heart-burnings. You see that I am in a moralizing humour, Miss Ratcliffe. Shall you be offended if I go on to give you a little advice before this long parting which it makes me so very serious to anticipate?"

"Offended, no!" said Mercedes, "only obliged. But it is not like you to ask the question, for you have often given me advice before, and I do not know why you should be less presuming now."

"Circumstances may rob me altogether of the privilege, but I will once more avail myself of it. My advice is of a more serious nature than it has commonly been, and, therefore, may not be listened to with that readiness which it has hitherto met with. It will not come well from my lips, I allow, but I cannot refrain from uttering a caution that no one else will speak."

Mercedes now changed colour: she could not retract her consent, nor indeed did she wish to do so; but she could not listen without embarrassment and agitation, guessing as she did, what subject he was approaching. Lord Sylvester continued with a gentleness and kindness of manner that could not fail to excite her gratitude:

"I know your devoted affection for your father, my dear Miss Ratcliffe, too well to suppose that you could be induced to take any very important step with regard to yourself without his knowledge and approbation; I know also that you never would willingly permit any secrecy to exist between you; yet

here the means of communication are slow and uncertain, and I fear that your youthful inexperience should occasion a want of caution that might lead to disagreeable and dangerous consequences, and that you should be induced to forget (he said with a strong emphasis on the word induced) how very advisable it is for you to avoid all acts, however trifling and apparently unimportant, that might lead the world to suppose you already in a position in which you can have no intention of placing yourself until you shall have received Mr. Ratcliffe's sanction for so doing. Am I too bold, or can you pardon a freedom which only my sincere interest in your welfare leads me to assume?"

"Yes, indeed I can," replied the blushing Mercedes almost inarticulately.

"May I then add, and still not offend, that some time lies before you ere you can be called on for a final decision? May I recommend you not to pass it carelessly; not to allow yourself to be diverted from serious thought; to consider well how much the happiness of future years depends on your present conduct? Youth is fleeting fast away. Your days cannot always pass in a summer dream of pleasure, and if you hope for the enjoyment of sober, tranquil bliss you must weigh well the motives that actuate you in the choice of one on whom you must henceforth be in dependence. Let me urge you not only to compare your different tastes and dispositions; these might harmonize although different; but mark well wherein your principles

vary, for if they are to be the rule of your lives, as they ought to be, there must be a perfect similarity between them. You have time given you for reflection, employ it carefully ; and if you follow my counsel to hold yourself free until your father's reply arrive, your decision may then be guided by the observations which you make now. I hope you clearly understand my meaning. I hope I am not alarming you more than is necessary."

"No," replied Mercedes, half smiling, and yet almost weeping, "I feel the kindness by which you are actuated, believe me. I see," she added after a moment's pause, "that you think me unprotected and unadvised ; but surely I am not so. I am rich in friends. Lady Sylvester's kindness to me is that of a mother," and Mercedes shed a flood of grateful tears ; her full heart needed relief.

Lord Sylvester regarded her with compassionate interest.

"Miss Ratcliffe," he said at length, scarcely with his accustomed calmness, "if a time ever come when you think that you are in need of a brother, remember me, and call on me as you would on one. Will you do this?"

Mercedes, still more affected, could only hold out her hand in silence ; Lord Sylvester hoping that his words would not be wholly without effect, though he feared that he had done little to guard her from danger, proffered no further caution. His own departure was to take place that night, but he was

disappointed to find, on seeking Julian, that circumstances had now arisen which rendered it impossible for him to accompany him. He was however satisfied with the promise he received from him to follow in a few days, for he plainly read the sincerity of the painter's wish to fly from scenes divested of their natural powers of pleasing, and embittered by their association with thoughts of hopeless pain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Quì s' assise,
Quì si rivolse, e quì rattenne il passo :
Quì co' begli occhj mi trafisse il core :
Quì disse una parola, e quì sorrise.

PETRARCA.

THE day arrived for Julian's departure, and intending to set off at midnight as Lord Sylvester had done, he determined to see Mercedes once again, at whatever cost, at whatever risk of betraying his passion, of forfeiting her tranquil, unsuspecting friendship, of calling forth the ridicule of the indifferent, or the blame and sneers of those who knew him. He assured himself that he could stand the test of the moment of separation without losing his self-command, and he felt that though it be true that 'such partings break the heart they are meant to heal,' to go without seeing her again, would be still more intolerable. Accordingly he went to the house at an hour when he thought it scarcely probable that they would be absent. Great was his chagrin when he learnt that they were gone with some friends to a Villa a few miles from Rome, and would not return till dinner. The blank air of disappointment that overcast Wilmot's countenance at this intelligence was not unperceived by

the quick good-natured Italian who had given it to him. With an expression of mingled pity and cunning she added with a significant smile :

“Eh ! saranno alla festa strasera !”

“Where ?” demanded Julian eagerly.

“Dall’ Austria,” replied the woman ; it is their custom thus briefly to designate the embassies received in their city.

Julian lingered a little longer to question her further ; he was filled with a sudden desire to enter once again the apartments in which Mercedes lived ; to see her different implements of work, the books she read, the pencil she handled, lying around. He made some trifling pretext to the servant to induce her to let him enter ; she did so, but continued in the room with him, watching him with an air of curiosity. He walked up to the table at which Mercedes was generally occupied when he came there ; in a half open drawer he saw several sketches and loose sheets of paper, some of them covered with designs by his own hand, some by hers. How several of them brought back to his mind past conversations, and trivial occurrences ! How well he remembered the remarks she had made upon this, the look she had cast upon that ! Here how readily had she comprehended his meaning, there how well had she expressed some thought of her own ; he bent over these things with an unwearied scrutiny, and the deep sigh he heaved moved Chiaruccia to exercise an unwonted patience in allowing him to tarry there still uninterrupted.

Julian, however, with a sense of shame at the weakness he was indulging, and almost betraying to the eye of a menial, roused himself to depart, but he looked around for some memorial of Mercedes that he might bear away with him, before he withdrew. If she had been present, he knew that she would have given him any one of her drawings, or her books, or anything else that she believed acceptable to him, but the fact of its being the gift of her hand would have lessened, instead of increasing its value ; for the very unreluctance with which it would have been proffered, would have afforded a fresh proof of her blindness to his love, and of the calmness of her own feelings. Though Julian would have recoiled with horror from the discovery of having excited any sentiments beyond those of friendship in her heart ; would have upbraided himself as a traitor to her father, his generous benefactor, and would have fled from her presence with precipitation the moment he found that she shared his danger ; yet in spite of the glaring inconsistency of feeling which he could not fail to detect in himself, he always experienced a severe pang on every occasion that confirmed his belief in the undisturbed serenity of Mercedes' mind. He hastily selected a drawing from some that were lying in an obscure corner ; while he viewed it with hesitation, the attention of Chiaruccia was fortunately attracted by the tinkling of a bell that announced the passing of some religious procession in the street, and throwing

open the window hastily, she leant eagerly from it, and straining forward, watched it in its progress until it disappeared. This accident had afforded Julian time to secrete his stolen treasure, and he then departed. He returned to his lodgings to complete his preparations for his journey, with the intention of attending the ball in the evening in order to see Mercedes, and after a brief, he cared not how brief, an interview, after the interchange of one parting word, he intended to quit a scene which he should seek only for that purpose.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

My mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

JULIAN, on his entrance into the ball-room, lingered near the door until the arrival of Lady Sylvester's party. Miss Ratcliffe at length appeared leaning on Wentworth's arm; a perfect understanding seemed to be established between them. Her smiling face was radiant with happiness; it beamed on her forehead and in her eyes; and even Wentworth's unhappy rival was forced to acknowledge that never had he appeared in such favourable colours as on this night. The absence of Mrs. Annesly Marchmont relieved him from all the embarrassment that had lessened the effect of his elegance of manner, and prevented the flow of his brilliant vivacity. Lady Sylvester was more than ever caressingly fond of her young *protégée*, who seemed to feel no need of anything to render the festive scene one of absolute delight. On seeing Julian, she recognised him with kindness, saying :

“ I thought you were already gone; I saw your

card at home, and thought you were set out for for Naples. You might have been of our party to-day."

She said this so carelessly, that Julian felt that it scarcely needed a reply, and before he could make any Wentworth led her away. This conduct on his part instantly struck Julian as intentional, and a feeling of sudden resentment increased his dislike. He saw, too, that Mercedes, now through Mrs. Annesly Marchmont's departure, without a rival, was more surrounded by admirers, more besieged by flattery, than she had ever before been. To some who love (or who think that they love) such an observation would have afforded pleasure. Some men require confirmation from others in their love, and in their admiration. If its object be weighed in the balance of fashion, and found wanting, their value for it sinks proportionably. This was not the case with Julian; his remark made him only the more profoundly melancholy. He would rather that the charms of her he adored should have been like the hidden virtues of the lowly herb; known but to few, and unprized by the many.

He observed that Miss Ratcliffe danced more than once with Wentworth, and that he, when she was engaged with others, stood idly by with an air of confident triumph which forced Julian to hate him.

The evening passed slowly on. Brilliant as was the scene before him, there was but one point of attraction in it to Wilmot. Neglected and for-

gotten as he seemed to be, a feeling came over him as if he knew himself to be deeply injured. Why did Mercedes waste so lavishly, smiles and words on numbers who could not prize them as he would? Why, if he attempted to draw near in the hopes of speaking to her, was he ever intercepted by some gay and successful applicant who bore her quickly from him? Could she be blind to his eager wish to approach her? Did she seek to thwart it? If any spoke to him, moved perhaps to do so by his sad countenance and apparent loneliness, he could scarcely frame a coherent reply, repulsed them with irascibility, or discouraged them by listless coldness. They were soon wearied, and discontinued their advances, and he was thus left to himself. He was not habitually repulsive, or bitter, or sarcastic, but to-night he was each and all. His friend Raymond, who had often sought, and sometimes found in him a ready listener, was displeased at the change; but as his curiosity was awakened both by the metamorphosis, and also by finding him there so near the hour of his departure, and as he was never easily disconcerted by a rebuff, he continued beside him, seeking to elicit the real cause of that which puzzled him. However, as he found his companion obstinately bent on silence, he led him imperceptibly towards a group of Englishmen, who were discussing the topics of the day, and falling into the circle, mingled in their conversation. Julian remained, in spite of his change of situation, wholly abstracted from all around him, until some familiar name

seemed to catch his ear, and aroused his attention, although he did not distinctly distinguish it, nor at all discover how it was employed. Turning towards the speakers who had awakened him from his reverie, he listened impatiently for what was to follow.

“My authority,” said one, “is, I fear, not to be disputed. It must be true; and we shall see it all in the Galignani to-morrow.”

“Shocking!” Tremendous!” “Unheard of ruin!” “Mad speculations!” “Wild schemes!” were the words that on all sides fell on Julian’s now attentive ear.

“Some one said that his daughter was here,” continued the first speaker; “I should like to see her.”

“There, there,” replied several to his inquiry; “there she is, dressed in white, with a lily in her hair. *La belle des belles.*”

“Poor child!” said one old man in a voice of pity, and Julian (for it was Mercedes whom they had pointed out) turned to him with all the distraction of anxiety, and exclaimed in accents of agonized supplication:

“Tell me, Sir, what you know that makes you pity her?”

The old man looked at his young interrogator for a moment; perhaps in that moment he read his heart, for he took his arm and led him kindly a little apart from the crowd, and said to him gently:

"That gentleman is just come from Civita Vecchia, and his news from England is, that the great house of Ratcliffe and Moore is bankrupt ; that utter ruin has come upon it, and that poor thing's father is dead ; some say that he has fallen by his own hand, but that report has not been verified."

Julian heard no more—his senses failed him ; the room swam before his eyes and he fell backwards. When he recovered, he found himself in a large outer saloon leading to those open for reception. Raymond was with him, who, when he unclosed his eyes, said :

"Well, my dear fellow, how are you now ? What ailed you ? I thought all the evening that something went wrong with you. Is it the heat and the glare of that crowded room ? Come, I will get you home. There is old Mordaunt will lend me his carriage for a lift. There is an hour or two before you ere you need start."

Julian had now collected his scattered senses, and raising himself, he said in a hollow voice :

"No, no, I must go back. I cannot go home yet. I thank you, but let me pass. Do not detain me here," and passing him rapidly without further explanation, he made his way back into the ball-room.

"No," he thought to himself as he hurried forward, "I cannot go yet. Never, perhaps, shall I see that face bright, and happy, and smiling again ! Oh, God ! hours of darkness and distress

are coming upon her, and must I forsake her! Of what avail am I here? She loves another, let him stand by her; he is powerful, wealthy, high-born, he can protect her from every storm. Let me fly. If her presence were full of danger to me when she was happy and prosperous, what would it be when she is in sorrow and tears!"

Still he sought it, for though this last thought flashed across his mind, no selfish consideration could have impelled him to quit her. A conviction of the utter inutility of his presence prevented him from changing his design of departure; but he hastened on, eager to do that little to serve her, which he felt was not forbidden by honour.

He entered the room, and quickly discovered the object of his search. Still Arundel was at her side, and a throng around her. He forced his way rapidly, but gently, through the crowd, and in defiance of the frown that he saw on Arundel's brow, reached her, and determinedly placed himself close to her, saying in a low voice:

"Miss Ratcliffe, let me speak to you but a few words. After I quit this room, I shall leave Rome within an hour. The morning dawn will find me far from it."

Without any hesitation, Mercedes put her arm into his, and walked to a little distance from those who had surrounded her; and no one interrupted her in her course nor presumed to follow her, for there was a dignity in the demeanour of Mercedes that won her respect, and taught those who desig-

nated her as the Queen of Beauty, that she would have submission as well as mere lip homage from those who acknowledged themselves her subjects. Not even Arundel ventured to approach. When she found herself apart from the crowd, and standing within a recess to which Julian had directed her steps, she raised her eyes to his face, as if waiting for him to speak.

“Before I bid you farewell, Miss Ratcliffe,” he said in a tremulous voice, “I would allude once more to all the benefits I have received at your hands, and at those of your father, (Julian shuddered as he uttered that name, but he did not dare to alarm the daughter’s heart by the betrayal of an unconfirmed report) and once more make a profession of the heart-felt gratitude which they have excited. I never hope to repay them, only I entreat you, if you are willing to add one more kindness to the many conferred, to promise me that if at any period of your life, sooner or later, you know or think that it is in my power to execute any one of your wishes, to serve you in any degree, to accomplish any task, difficult or easy of performance, that you may desire to have accomplished,—if I can defend you in any danger or distress—forgive me, Miss Ratcliffe, I forget myself. I know not what I would say. If I have offended you by my words, forgive me, and promise me, once more I ask it, to apply to me if such a case as I have described ever occur, to rely on my devotion as your mother relied on that of my mother,

and never to believe yourself destitute of a friend, while I or any of my family are within your reach."

He paused for her reply. Impressed by his vehemence, and impelled by an impulse she could neither explain nor resist, she replied with great earnestness :

"I do promise all you ask."

"God bless you for those words," said the young painter, passionately; and darting through a door that was near them, he disappeared. Mercedes remained where he left her. She grew pale and thoughtful.

"Some danger that I know not of surely threatens me. All this evening, in spite of my happiness, have I had a secret misgiving, a presentiment of evil; some misfortune awaits me. But," and her eye brightened again with the thought, "I am with friends. Arundel and his mother are near me."

Arundel was near her; and, at intervals, for a few brief moments, Mercedes would forget the shock she had received and be gay. The colour again mantled on her cheek, but it burned too much; and the smile that curled her lip was a forced one. Some hours passed before she left the brilliant room, heated and fatigued, and with an inward "ominous sinking of the heart," she knew not why; but she passed her hand across her brow, and sighed.

As she moved on, supported by Wentworth's arm, she passed an old man, who gazed on her as

if she had been his daughter ; and he said again as he had said before :

“ Poor child ! ”

Mercedes heard these words, and she turned her head quickly to see from whence they came ; but the speaker fell back among the crowd, and she could not discern him. Wentworth laughed, and told her that she was mistaken in supposing that they could be meant for her ; but in spite of herself and of her unwillingness to give him pain, she burst into tears. Wentworth and his mother, the latter loading the weeping girl with caresses, and both lamenting the weariness which they supposed to occasion this emotion, hurried her away ; and the old man who, though not in sight, still lingered near them, muttered, not audibly :

“ Ah ! her true lover is gone, and a false one holds the place that he should have. But he will go too, ere long, I suspect.”

Thus, while those most deeply interested are easily blinded and deceived, the tongue of common report will repeat the truths which touch them nearest, and bear them to every ear save the one to which they might bring security.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The bright day is gone !

CYMBELINE.

Mia benigna fortuna, e 'l viver lieto,
I chiari giorni, e le tranquille notti,
Volti subitamente in doglia e 'n pianto
Odiar vita mi fanno, e bramar morte !
Nessun visse giammai più di me lieto ;
Nessun vive più tristo e giorni e notti.

PETRARCA.

WHEN Mercedes came to the breakfast-table the following morning, the dread that Julian's strange words had inspired seemed to have passed away ; and with a joyous smile upon her lips, she exclaimed :

“ To-day is post day from England ; I shall have a letter from my father ! ”

She clasped her hands with delight, and turning to Wentworth, said :

“ You will fetch it for me, will you not ? ”

Wentworth readily assented, for he now exerted himself to please her in every possible way with a manifest anxiety to succeed that touched Mercedes' heart.

The unhappy Mercedes was not to preserve her peaceful ignorance even for the few hours that must pass before Arundel could comply with her

request. She took up a "*Galignani*" that lay still unopened on the table, and breaking the paper that bound it, laid it before the fire to dry. As she did so, her father's name, in larger letters than the rest, caught her eye: she ran it quickly over the paragraph and catching the arm of Wentworth who was standing near, fell senseless at his feet.

Who can describe the anguish of that day! The frantic desperation — the stern disbelief — asserted with wild hysteric laughter, and the horror, oh Heaven, of believing! The chilling horror of feeling belief slowly creeping in, and paralysing the fainting heart! This it is with which we struggle and fight, as the benumbed traveller rouses himself, and resists the fatal slumber that steals over him, for he knows that it is the forerunner of death: so do we, in our agony, repel fiercely that credence which would give the death-blow to hope; that assures us all is over, past, finished; that there is no scope for action, for the mortal wound was inflicted before we were on our guard to ward it off.

None can imagine what hopelessness is but those who have felt it. It seems as if life could not exist in companionship with it, but yet it does!

Dolor che sì mi cruci,
E non m'uccidi mai!

Not from Lady Sylvester, nor her son, could the overwhelming grief of this unhappy orphan

meet with any adequate sympathy ; but their consternation and dismay equalled her own. The disappointed peeress would very soon, as she began to realise the total wreck of her mercenary hopes, have begun to consider herself almost as much an object of pity and commiseration as the heart-broken daughter ; but the violence of Mercedes' agony speedily told so much on her delicate frame, that Lady Sylvester's soliloquies were checked by the alarm she felt, and communicating the state in which the unhappy girl now lay to Wentworth, they agreed immediately to summon medical advice. It was well they did so ; distraction of mind had thrown her already into a high fever, and before night, delirium banished the reality of woe from her mind, though only to replace it by visions not less distressing.

During the many hours that elapsed before the unfortunate Mercedes became again conscious of the misery of her situation, Lady Sylvester's mind was divided between the anxiety which even *she* could not escape with regard to the fate of the poor young creature, who had been committed to her charge by a parent who had now ceased to exist, and to whom she could render no account of the manner in which she should fulfil her self-arrogated duty on this side of the grave ; and the eager desire she felt to ascertain the real situation of her unfortunate *protégée*, should she survive the sickness occasioned by her grief for the loss of a parent whom she loved so passionately.

Wentworth recoiled with horror when he saw in the paragraph that had met the daughter's eye, the death of Mr. Ratcliffe was attributed to his own rash hand ; he dropped the paper with a shudder and concealed his face. But his mother did not long leave him to undisturbed reflections. In such an hour as this even she was agitated, and lost so much of her ready self-possession as to form, and propose, and reject, a thousand inconsistent plans. Surprised to find that no letters arrived for Mercedes, she, after some consideration, which seemed to silence any scruples of delicacy, proposed to Wentworth to start for England to ascertain the true state of things on the spot, and this she advised him to do without delay.

"If I want any one," she said, "I will write to Sylvester, and I am sure he would come back. I am by no means certain that he does not love this poor child himself. At all events, you do no good here. I suppose that you don't wish to get entangled for life."

Wentworth was ashamed to appear to understand the base insinuation to which his mother was not ashamed to give utterance, and for a few moments there was silence.

At length he replied, in a voice of hesitation,

"I will not leave Rome while Mercedes is in danger."

His mother saw that she had spoken too plainly, and had actually excited disgust, even in a mind that she believed not to be superior to her own

views. She desisted, but she was not dismayed, for she read in the very tremulousness with which he spoke, that she should meet with no protracted opposition to her will. Wentworth learnt from the banker that English letters had arrived for Lord Sylvester, though not for them; and these had, in obedience to his parting directions, been immediately forwarded to Naples, so that they must remain in ignorance of their contents until they were communicated by himself. On the third day from that terrible one which laid Mercedes prostrate on a bed that seemed likely to be the bed of death, Lord Sylvester transmitted to them these important tidings. One of the letters received by him was written by Maxwell, Mr. Ratcliffe's confidential clerk. It confirmed the account of the disastrous ruin of his master's house, but stated the falseness of attributing his death to his own violence. He expired in a fit of apoplexy, occasioned by overpowering agitation. Lord Sylvester bid them to guard Mercedes carefully from the knowledge of this first report; but if it unhappily reached her ears, to administer as speedily as possible to the merchant's unhappy child the only consolatory truth that existed for her. To this letter Lady Sylvester sent an immediate reply; whether its tone excited doubts in Lord Sylvester's mind, or whether feelings of pity for Mercedes were so strong in his heart as to impel him to return, we cannot take on ourselves to decide; we will only inform our readers that a second

epistle shortly arrived from him, informing them that he should speedily follow it, for he had determined not to proceed into Greece without first ascertaining by his presence on the spot, whether it was possible for him to do anything that could afford any alleviation to Miss Ratcliffe's irremediable sufferings.

The interval between these two letters was by no means uneventful. Mercedes gradually became again alive to all the misery of her situation. She regained a heart-rending consciousness of what had befallen her, and, though in her enfeebled state, her thoughts were still incoherent, and her mind unable to pursue any subject with continuity; yet she in a measure began to feel all the anxiety of uncertainty, as well as the bitterness of grief. Lady Sylvester, who had from the first declared her inability to witness such sorrow, and had left her solely to the care and attendance of her maid and the physician, as soon as she learnt that her reason was restored, felt that to relieve her from the horror attending the belief she held as to the circumstances of her father's death, would be the kindest act that could be performed; and after some reflection, she decided that the safest, the least agitating way of approaching the subject with her would be the transmission of Lord Sylvester's extract from Maxwell's letter without comment. She consulted the physician, who concurred in her opinion, and to him she gave the paper which he placed in Mercedes' hand, when he left her, assuring

her that in its contents she would find great comfort. He trusted that the salutary effects of removing that grief which must be the most harrowing to her bosom, would more than compensate for the passing emotion which was unavoidably awakened. Nor was this judgment erroneous, for hitherto Mercedes had felt herself nearly destroyed by the resolute manner in which she had kept secret the agony caused by the awful belief with which her mind had been impressed. She could not dwell on it without feeling her brain nearly maddened by the horrible thought. It was the last that delirium had banished; it was the first that reason recalled. In the anguish and shame of such a belief, she had made a resolution never again to open her lips to any human being on the subject of the latter end of her father. It did such violence to all her previous veneration and love, that she quickly had recourse to the less hateful idea that insanity must have mastered his intellect before he could have rushed uncalled into his Maker's presence. Now this crushing sorrow was removed, and instead of it, she received the sweet and soothing knowledge that her father had been taken away from the evil days that were coming. True it is that Mercedes' tears flowed more profusely while she perused this letter than they had ever yet done; but they were as refreshing as a shower to the parched earth—they were as dew to the withered grass—and the words that drew them forth were sweet as the manna in the wilderness.

Mercedes, as she became more composed, pleaded so earnestly to see Lady Sylvester, and transmitted such tender messages to her through the physician and through the domestic, that she was ashamed to shun compliance with them. She felt herself much embarrassed by the perfect reliance on her affection which Mercedes unhesitatingly manifested ; and when she would have inquired in faint accents of Arundel, his mother only stooped over her, and silenced her with a kiss, telling her that if she persisted in attempting to speak, she must leave her instantly. Whenever she executed this threat, and left Mercedes in solitude, the unhappy girl was tortured by reflections that seemed to threaten to bring her back to the brink of the grave. The silence imposed by Wentworth's mother with regard to him began to seem strange and mysterious. She dwelt with peculiar anguish on the thought that a foul disgrace would henceforth rest on the name borne by her father and herself for the ruin brought upon hundreds ; that the happiness of many families would be forever destroyed, and parents and children would execrate them. Then there arose a torturing question—could she ally herself to Wentworth penniless and unportioned, when he had sought her wealthy ? Was she to enter a family that had shown condescension in admitting her when prosperous, now that shame alone stripped her name of obscurity, giving it an ignominious celebrity ? With these bitter thoughts rankling at her heart,

she resolved to hasten to set Wentworth free from every vow that shackled him.

Arundel, in spite of the exercise of arts well able to baffle more experience and more suspicion than he had to combat, had never entirely succeeded in inspiring confidence in the heart of the woman whose affection he sought. Her love, therefore, had never been perfect, for it had never been without fear. If Wentworth's present conduct should banish doubt, then would her heart become wholly his:—the hour of trial was now arrived.

Accordingly the poor orphan resolved with a vigour of decision which had hitherto lain dormant in her character, that in her very next interview with Lady Sylvester she would send a message to Arundel extorting an answer as should tell her whether she were alone in the world or not. She found, however, that she had overrated her strength. While Lady Sylvester was with her she felt it absolutely impossible to approach this subject; perhaps it was that she was sensible of the existence of an indescribable change in Lady Sylvester's manner that chilled her heart and awoke apprehensions, and silenced her when she tried to speak. As long, therefore, as Lady Sylvester remained in the room, she turned her face away from her, and remained silent. The tears slowly trickled down her cheek, but she would not raise her hand to wipe them away, and she stifled the sobs with which her bosom heaved.

At length, when she heard Lady Sylvester rise,

and move away with a stealthy step, as if she thought that she slept, she made a sudden effort, and raising her head from her pillow, turned towards her, and beckoned to her to approach. Making her lean down to her, she murmured in a scarcely audible whisper :

“Dearest Lady Sylvester, give me a pencil and a bit of paper, that I may write to Arundel !”

Lady Sylvester started ; her countenance expressed alarm, and she was preparing to expostulate, but Mercedes added imploringly :

“Do not oppose me, I beseech you. I must do this. I shall have no rest till it is done !”

Lady Sylvester, in silence, complied with her request ; and Mercedes, as she took the writing materials from her hand, said :

“Will you come again for it ? I should like to be alone while I write.”

When she found herself alone, she could not immediately proceed in the bitter task which she had imposed on herself. She even paused again to debate on the necessity for it ; but her heart told her that she was only practising self-deception in thus hesitating, and she conquered the repugnance which she could not but feel.

Still she delayed the execution of her purpose ; for other considerations arose in her mind, filling it with doubt and pain.

Would the communication which she designed to make outrage Wentworth's feelings ? She tried to conceive what her own would be in his situa-

tion ; and she pictured him to herself casting from him with scorn the imputation which the words she meant to employ would tacitly convey, and smarting with the wound that suspicion would inflict.

As she meditated thus, another far more agonizing thought sprang up. She imagined Wentworth reading the words that cost her so dear with ill-disguised satisfaction. A sense of shame might, perhaps, for a time prevent him from availing himself of a release which in reality he coveted—or would he even have the indelicacy to snatch it eagerly?

She covered her face with her thin, pale hands, and wept. She fancied that she heard Lady Sylvester's approaching step, and hastily snatching up the paper, wrote thus :

“ It is impossible for me to see you yet. For both our sakes it is better not to delay the few words I wish to say to you. I am no longer, Mr. Wentworth, her whose hand you sought. My heart feels broken though they seem to think that I shall live on. Disgrace and poverty are come upon me. Do not ally yourself with them. I release you.”

The struggle was over—the effort was complete—she sank back exhausted, and when Lady Sylvester came again, she feebly pointed to the folded paper and did not speak.

The moment that Lady Sylvester had quitted the room, she opened the paper, read its contents with evident exultation, and sought Wentworth.

CHAPTER XXX.

La croyance donne une sérénité, une fraîcheur à tous nos sentiments, que le doute dessèche et flétrit.—CAPEFIGUE.

Mourn'st thou, poor soul, and would'st thou yet
Call back the things that shall not, cannot be ?
Heaven must be won, not dreamed. Thy task is set ;
Peace was not made for earth, nor rest for thee.

FROUDE'S REMAINS.

WHAT was the purchase of Mercedes' struggles and tears ? Wentworth and his mother commented with few of either on the words her trembling hand had scarcely known how to form. Lady Sylvester began to applaud the right judgment, the good feeling which had dictated them.

"The only step for you to take," said she to her son, "is to go from hence ; return without delay to England ; you will then be able to make yourself fully informed of Mercedes' real situation. She cannot blame you. She sees the thing in its true light. No one, indeed, can doubt the absolute necessity and wisdom of cutting short at once ties that cannot be continued. All delay is, indeed, cruelty to her."

"What reply," said Wentworth, in a thick constrained voice, for he was not so blind to the

dishonour he was incurring as his mother desired him to be. "What reply can I give to Miss Ratcliffe's note?"

"None, none," interrupted Lady Sylvester eagerly. "I will tell her that you go to render her the sole service that remains in your power. Remember," she added with increased alarm, as she watched a dark cloud overcast his countenance: "I am not suggesting merely what is reasonable, but what is indispensable. Can you, yourself without fortune, marry an absolute beggar? You know the impossibility of such folly. Why linger here then? Begone—spare Mercedes and yourself all further suspense."

"Mercedes," replied Wentworth in a solemn manner, "must be made to know all this as well as you and I know it."

"Of course she shall—she does now; you see it in her own words."

"And tell her that I shall never forget her."

"I will," answered Lady Sylvester, turning away her head to conceal the contemptuous half-smile which this speech provoked.

Wentworth departed that evening, and Mercedes learnt the fact from Lady Sylvester who conveyed it to her with all the caution and the delicacy that could attend such a communication.

Mercedes began to fear that she had no friend. The delusion which had led her to repose confidence in Lady Sylvester and Arundel was now gradually vanishing. As yet, however, it was the waking,

not the dream, that seemed unreal. She still mused on the past, rather than on the present; she thought of them as they had been, not as they were. Then would the thread of her reflections be suddenly broken by some heart-piercing recollection of what now was, and she would restlessly seek a new posture; would rise on her couch, and folding her hands, would press them to her heart, and murmur: "Am I then without a friend?"

Thus would she ask when she had been soothing herself by an imaginary enjoyment of sympathy, pouring out all her most intimate thoughts; all that pressed most heavily on her spirit; all the terrible fears that besought contradiction; all the faint hopes that needed to be assured; all the tender half-spoken appeals for pity that ought to be read before the sufferer has undergone the pain of expressing them; all the high determinations of endurance, patience, and resignation that need to be strengthened and confirmed by approbation; all the weak repinings that are quickly silenced by the replies of an impartial reasoner. All these things found a place in the fancied conversations which she held, and the voice that responded to her was sometimes that of Wentworth, but still more often that of Lady Sylvester; and sometimes she wondered at their absence, and no voice answered her; and she felt in a solitude too oppressive for her broken spirit to support. Then she would weep, and say: "I have no friend!"

Sometimes she would remember how she had been led to believe in the strength and earnest truth of Wentworth's passion, and would anxiously inquire if she had ever been really loved? If this were all that was to be expected from love? How different then from what she had believed it to be! Of how little value was that which she had held as so great a prize! She remembered the time when she shed tears of joy while whispering in low tones to herself: "I am beloved!" and this it was to be beloved! Another question arose: was it that all human love is of so little worth, or was it that Wentworth was faithless, and she, first deceived, and now forsaken? Sometimes she fell upon remembrances of Lord Sylvester and of Julian. They both remained absent; they did not seek her in her loneliness; but still she often unconsciously speculated in her own mind, whether, had either of them been to her what Wentworth had been, their conduct would have resembled his.

As she was incessantly haunted by this thought, "I have no friend;" as she was utterly disappointed in those she had made her heart's treasures, believing them to be friends,—she felt that it would be now but wise to ascertain what it was that was really worthy to bear that title;—what it was that would suffice for her necessity.

Reflection told her that she wanted a friend who should be always with her as long as she sojourned in the valley of the shadow of death;

never removed from her by time or distance ; never far from her side in the most imminent hour of peril, and the most agonized day of sorrow, so as to constrain her to groan fruitlessly for a consoling presence. She recollected that the friend who is absent from our sufferings is also ignorant of them, at least for the present hour, and she wanted a friend who should see every emotion of her heart, every tear that she dropped ; that should read every desire, and to whom every secret should be known.

She wanted a friend that would bear with her infirmities in sickness and in sorrow ; that was well acquainted with all her weaknesses—that would support her when she faltered—that would keep her in the right path, yet be gentle and mild, so as never to crush her broken spirit ; never tear open the wounds of her heart, making them bleed afresh, but bind them up and pour balm into them. A friend that would shed tears with her and for her. Yes, she wanted above all things a friend who had learnt by experience, (which alone can teach,) the bitterness of the cup of which she drank ; who knew what it was to be separated by death from those who loved, and to be scoffed at, betrayed, and forsaken by those who had been loved ; who knew the pain of a heart pierced by ingratitude.

When she had enumerated all these qualifications, she felt that she also wanted a friend who

had power to relieve the sorrows he deplored, strength to bear her burden for her, and love to induce him so to do. And after Mercedes had prayed long and earnestly, she knew that she was *not* without a friend, even in *all* these things, such as her heart required.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Better a thousand such as I
Their grief untold, should pine and die,
Than her bright morning overcast,
With sullen clouds should be defaced.

WALLER.

But he, his own affection's counsellor,
Is to himself—I will not say—how true,
But to himself so secret and so close,
So far from sounding and discovery,
As is the bud bit with an envious worm,
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE mind of Julian was distracted at the thoughts of having abandoned her for whom he would so willingly have died, and wholly occupied in picturing in the most lively colours, the anguish with which Mercedes would receive the tidings that awaited her. He upbraided himself with his desertion of her, and could scarcely refrain from precipitately retracing his steps, and turning a deaf ear to those motives which had induced him to proceed so far. When he arrived at Mola di Gaeta, where he intended to pass the night, without pausing to admire the surpassing loveliness of the spot, he entered the inn, and taking some paper from

his portfolio strove to soothe his mind by the composition of a letter which he hoped might be of some future use to Mercedes. It was addressed to his mother; he was resolved to commend the orphan to the protection of his parents, for he mistrusted her noble friends. So intense was his anxiety to impress on their minds the same feelings that he entertained, that no language of appeal he could frame, seemed to him sufficiently imbued with the pathos or the force of truth. He was writing to his mother, her from whom he never concealed his thoughts or feelings; the only human being perhaps with whom the shyness of his disposition allowed him to commune with perfect unreserve; and yet now his tongue seemed tied, and the expression of his sentiments clogged and embarrassed; and he finally closed his letter with the fear that they would be ill comprehended, either with regard to their nature, or the extent to which he carried them.

The evening of the following day Julian reached Naples; on seeking Lord Sylvester at the hotel, he found him absent. He was gone to dine at the English Embassy, and afterwards intended to visit the San Carlo Theatre, for it was a gala night. His return therefore could not be till a very late hour. Julian, directly that he heard how he had disposed of his evening, decided in his own mind, that the terrible news concerning Mr. Ratcliffe had not yet reached his ears; he then must be the first to communicate them. To look forward to an

interview for such a purpose gave him the greatest pain ; but his anxiety to see his friend, and to tell him of this dreadful report was so intense that he found, fatigued though he was, it would be perfectly unavailing to seek for repose until he had accomplished this task.

Telling the people of the house, therefore, that he would await Lord Sylvester's return, he entered the saloon appropriated to his use, and threw himself into an easy chair beside the table. His eye glanced over it ; there were scattered around cards of different visitors of all nations, aristocrats, commoners, diplomatists, generals, princes ;—notes and cards of invitation were thrown together,— catalogues and books of reference piled upon each other showed that his Lordship's hours were not allowed to pass unoccupied. Julian's eye, as it surveyed this heterogeneous mass, was arrested by a sealed letter unopened, the superscription of which he saw was to himself, and in Lord Sylvester's own handwriting. At this moment a servant entered, and began to search on the table for something which he could not find, when looking up and perceiving the letter in Julian's hand, he informed him that his Padrone had left it with him to be delivered to him immediately on his arrival. He then retired, and Julian throwing himself back in his chair, broke the seal with some trepidation, and read a detail of the circumstances which were already known to him, and with which our readers likewise are acquainted. The concluding words of the epistle were as follows :

“Now I will not conceal from you that although my brother, whom I left almost affianced to her, and my mother, who has ever professed a maternal affection for her, are both beside Mercedes, I shall feel more satisfaction in receiving tidings of her through you than through them. So strongly have I this perhaps unauthorized but irrepressible feeling of anxiety on her account, that I think I shall return to Rome for a short time in order to see what arrangements are making for her journey back to England.”

Julian as he finished this passage exclaimed:

“Is it possible that he could write such a letter as this, and then join a party at a theatre!” He was lost in amazement, and not without feelings of indignation. He could scarcely reconcile the existence of that warm-hearted benevolence which prompted to acts of the greatest kindness and generosity, with the absence of that tender sensibility with which in himself it was closely united, but which in Lord Sylvester’s eyes was but a deteriorating quality,

Pampering the heart
With feelings all too delicate for use,

and alike destroying the peace of its possessor and diminishing his utility.

Julian was roused from his reflections by the sound of Lord Sylvester’s voice, inquiring if he were arrived. He started up to reply but found himself, on thus suddenly rising, scarcely able to stand; his head was dizzy; he grasped the table

for support, and when Lord Sylvester advanced towards him, sank back into the chair, and buried his face in his hands. Affected by the sight of his friend's extreme agitation, Lord Sylvester tried to soothe him, but a feeling of pride came to Julian's aid, for he could not endure to give way to emotion in the presence of one who had so completely maintained his self-possession, as to mix without interruption in the common routine of life. He composed himself therefore as speedily as possible, and the remaining hours of the night were spent by the two friends in discoursing on the melancholy subject that engaged, perhaps almost equally, the thoughts of both.

At length they separated, and when they met again, Lord Sylvester would not allow himself nor his friend to give utterance to the doubts which prevailed in both their minds with regard to the future conduct of Lady Sylvester and of her son. He felt that he was as yet unauthorised to indulge in the harsh suspicions that suggested themselves, and though they weighed too strongly with him to allow him with a quiet conscience to leave Mercedes wholly in the power of her present protectors, yet he determined in justice to them to stand, if possible, entirely aloof, and not to interfere with any proposition that they made, unless it became absolutely necessary to do so. Until an answer should arrive to the letter which he had written to Lady Sylvester, he decided on remaining where he was.

The unhappy Julian, in the meantime, was in a state of utter wretchedness, and restless excitement. The agony of Mercedes was ever present to him, and in spite of his struggles and his self-reproaches, he found that he could not picture to himself Wentworth consoling her, without the most bitter aggravation of his sufferings. He could not endure to see Lord Sylvester remain inactive, he even upbraided him openly with coolness; but his friend bore with him silently and compassionately. Lady Sylvester's answer when it came, did not give Lord Sylvester satisfaction; and yet he could scarcely put his finger on the word or sentence in it that displeased him; nevertheless he now resolved that he would return to Rome. He expected that on communicating this decision to Julian, he would declare an intention of returning with him. Whatever might be his friend's wishes, he did not now intend either to combat or to counsel, for he thought that in his present state of mind it was best to leave him to himself. Julian received his intimation in silence, not even expressing satisfaction. He proved that he had no idea of accompanying him, by giving him the letter which he had written to his mother, briefly entreating him to place it in Mercedes' hands, with an earnest request that she would make use of it on her return to England. Having signified this wish, he relapsed into silence, and seemed about to see his friend depart in the same mood of blank despair. Compassion sealed

the lips of Lord Sylvester, though he was wounded by Julian's deportment towards him; without reproach or allusion to it, he extended his hand to the young painter to bid him adieu, when Julian, grasping it with sudden vehemence, while tears no longer to be repressed gushed from his eyes, exclaimed in broken accents :

“ May God reward you for this act ! ” and hastily escaped from his presence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte,
 Mi guida Amor, ch' ogni segnato calle
 Provo contrario alla tranquilla vita.

* * * *

Per alti monti, e per selve aspre trovo
 Qualche riposo : ogni abitato loco
 E nemico mortal degli occhj miei.
 A ciascun passo nasce un pensier novo
 Della mia Donna.

PETRARCA.

WHEN Lord Sylvester was gone, Julian lived in the utmost loneliness. He made no acquaintance in Naples ; and if by chance he saw at a distance any persons whom he had previously known elsewhere, he would escape their notice, and shun their approach. He hated the gay and noisy city ; its mirthful crowd, and the idle throng of strangers—the very brilliancy of its sun seemed to mock him. He could not endure to remain where he was ; and yet he would not venture to quit Naples, dreading lest by doing so he might lose the letters which Lord Sylvester had promised to write to him there. At last a plan suggested itself which pleased his fancy. He drove one day to Portici, and entered a mean and lowly habitation immediately upon the shore ; the waves that lashed the walls of the little

garden beyond it, seemed to soothe him by their ceaseless voice. He obtained, without much difficulty, a lodging in it, of which he took immediate possession. Here established, he would leave a sleepless bed at an early hour, and mount the black and dreary side of Vesuvius—that gloomy monument of Nature’s fury. These scenes of desolation seemed congenial to his present mood, and more than once he toiled up the steep ascent to the very summit, and mused in solitude on the brink of the yawning crater, which vomited all the while smoke and flames. In the plains where Pompeii stands he would also wander; traversing its silent streets, or seating himself for hours on a fallen capital near some dismantled temple. Thus did he employ himself, “*traînant sa vie de fatigues en fatigues, comme pour se distraire de lui même.*”

Every evening he returned to his lodgings where he had engaged a boat to be at his service; into this he would spring, and bidding the man to pull him to Naples, would fling himself down in a gloomy silence that seemed to quell the spirits of the lively Neapolitan and still his loquacity. Thus would they proceed in unbroken taciturnity, except that the boatman would sometimes raise a strange wild song, so melancholy in its long protracted tones, that Julian would permit him to continue it without interruption. As soon as he landed, he would seek the Padrone di casa, with whom Lord Sylvester had lodged, and whom he had engaged

to procure his letters for him, and taking in any that awaited him, would return whence he came.

But we will not transcribe the dispatches which Julian received, but rather prefer following Lord Sylvester to Rome in the belief that we shall be able to give a detail of many facts which were concealed from his eyes, and to elucidate many circumstances that appeared to him involved in mystery.

Night was beginning to close in when Lord Sylvester entered Rome, and he immediately hastened to the Palazzo —. The servant who answered his summons started with astonishment on recognizing him.

“Sta in casa il Signorino?” was Lord Sylvester’s impatient demand.

“Eh! Milor—è partito!” replied Felice, with many shrugs of surprise and dismay—“e la Signora madre—she is very ill, and Miss Ratcliffe at the point of death.”

“But not now? She is recovering, is she not?”

Eh! Chi sa! She has never quitted her chamber.”

“But what do you mean by saying that Mr. Wentworth is gone? Gone! When? Where?”

“To England. He departed yesterday.”

Lord Sylvester paused for a moment to restrain the indignation which this reply awoke. Then, with as much coolness of manner as he could command, he said:

“I will go in and see Lady Sylvester.”

He passed the servant and opening the door himself, stood before Lady Sylvester. She started on beholding him, but it was more with dismay than surprise. She sank down again on the seat from which she had risen, and covered her face with her hands. Lord Sylvester, confident that Wentworth's departure must have been sanctioned, and probably instigated by her, was ill disposed to feel tenderly towards her. Otherwise this visible emotion, the sobs that now became audible, the change in her appearance since he last saw her, for she looked ill and harassed, and robbed by anxiety of all appearance of youth, might have touched him with compassion. As it was, he maintained a rigid silence. At length, however, finding that she did not attempt to remove the handkerchief that concealed her face from his view, he said with a chilling coldness :

"I find that Arundel has left you. How could he do so at such a time? If I had not returned what were you to do? And who so fit to be at Miss Ratcliffe's side, in such an hour, as her affianced husband?"

"Her affianced husband!" exclaimed Lady Sylvester; "that claim to be beside her had never received a parent's sanction, and now, alas! must for ever be resigned. I need not surely explain to you the impossibility of such a thing. You know your brother's circumstances. Could he exchange situations with you, he might enjoy the happiness of conferring affluence on the woman he loves; but

now he could only, by delaying his departure, have aggravated the pain of separation, which must eventually have been endured. Thank Heaven ! he did not so selfishly consult his own wishes ! No, he has torn himself from her side, and is hastening to England ; by so doing, he may yet in some measure serve this unfortunate girl. And let me add, that my poor Mercedes is no less alive to the propriety of this proceeding than we are. Her first thought was to declare my son free from all engagements entered into before this fatal occurrence."

"And he accepted this freedom?" inquired Lord Sylvester, without any outward sign of indignation.

"This, they both felt, was the only course he could pursue that would not tend to embitter their future existence."

"Would a proof of disinterested affection have had only that effect?"

Lady Sylvester reddened violently at this question ; but evading it, she again strove to move her son-in-law to commiseration.

"I am absolutely distracted whenever I think on this subject," she continued. "What am I to do? How can I ever get Mercedes back to England, and to her own friends?" (Lord Sylvester was well aware by this time that the unhappy orphan was not among her own friends.) "How painful to think that it is quite impossible for her to travel home at all in the way in which she came hither."

“Why surely,” exclaimed Lord Sylvester, “her expences could not have added very greatly to that of your journey?”

Lady Sylvester reddened again, and with a face of confusion and shame, hastily returned,

“How do you think all this will end? Surely if wealth is gone, a respectable maintenance will be saved for this girl out of the wreck of her father’s enormous fortune?”

“I fear not, if her father’s creditors are to be first satisfied. And I am afraid,” said Lord Sylvester, with a contemptuous emphasis on the word, “that the same sense of propriety that led Miss Ratcliffe to give Arundel his liberty, will make her desire that they should be considered before herself.”

At these words, Lady Sylvester looked quite dismayed, and little pleased with the severity of Lord Sylvester’s manner, she rose, and declared herself too much exhausted to prolong the conversation.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It were
More pleasing to me if alone I saw her.
Trust me, she will behave herself the more
Collectedly.

There are sorrows
Where of necessity, the soul must be
Its own support.

In her own bosom
Must she collect
The strength to rise superior to this blow.

COLERIDGE.

THE next morning Lord Sylvester had another interview with his mother-in-law. The interval that had intervened, during which both had reflected deeply, had made a change in her manner, such as might have deceived any one but Lord Sylvester, whose knowledge of her character, the result of an intimate study of it for years, rendered it quite impossible that he should suddenly give credit to appearances so unlike the reality which he had hitherto known, or trust in the existence of motives and sentiments so contradictory to all those which he had so often formerly detected in her.

Nevertheless, so perfect was this piece of acting on the part of Lady Sylvester, that she did not once lay herself open to detection by the smallest in-

consistency in any of her words and professions. Nothing could exceed the solicitude which she displayed when speaking of Mercedes ; nor could the delicacy with which she treated of her affairs be surpassed. She did not pretend to agree with Lord Sylvester's views of the case ; she asserted some very different opinions, as with respect to the necessity of Arundel's departure. While she did not conceal from him that she was alive to the existence of suspicions injurious to herself in his mind, she still behaved with a gentle firmness and dignity of demeanour that surprised him. She showed plainly, though not in words, that she felt deeply wounded and aggrieved by these doubts ; she did not repel them with resentment, but rather seemed prepared to prove them unjust by her conduct. She also displayed a candour which was a new trait in her character, and the one least looked for by her son-in-law. She confessed to him when they began to discuss the best means of removing Mercedes to England, that in their journey to Italy she had allowed the whole expense to devolve on her then wealthy companion, for her own narrow income would have been perfectly inadequate to maintain the luxurious style in which they had travelled and lived ; and Mr. Ratcliffe had been very willing to defray the whole of their expenditure up to the present time, in return for the advantageous position in which his daughter was placed by the introduction which Lady Sylvester gave her into society far above her in rank.

At this moment she declared herself to be in urgent distress; for little apprehensive of so fatal a termination to the wealthy merchant's career, and confident that she never could exceed the bounds of his liberality to his daughter, she had, for her sake indeed, indulged in unlimited expenses which now she knew not how to defray. She bitterly deplored this imprudence, especially because it so wholly incapacitated her from rendering the smallest assistance to this destitute orphan, whom she would have rejoiced to succour in her hour of need. Her protection and her care were all she had to give. To whom was she to apply for means to convey this almost dying girl back to the relatives she possessed?

Perhaps it will be with difficulty believed that Lady Sylvester, at the moment she spoke thus, was perfectly aware that she had still in her hands a considerable sum of money furnished by Mercedes' father, but though she had not exactly calculated, she believed that it would scarcely do more than defray the debts which she had incurred in Rome, the whole of which she was resolved to discharge before any portion should be applied to the use of Mercedes.

At the conclusion of this confession, Lady Sylvester's conduct had ceased to be a mystery to her son-in-law; he saw the whole drift of it plainly. He saw that whether her Ladyship was, or was not destitute as she described herself, she would not be induced to expend the smallest sum of money

on the necessities of her of whose wealth she had so unsparingly availed herself. He saw that her design was to throw Mercedes on his charity, and that all her protestations of affection for her, and of desire to render her all possible services, were only intended to lead him to place power in her hands. Revolting as all this was to him, he could still perceive no other suitable means of conveying Mercedes back to England but in company with Lady Sylvester, or he would gladly have rescued her from this false friend. As it was he could only seek some method of placing a check on Lady Sylvester's conduct that should make it, in some measure at least, such as he could desire.

After weighing the subject with deliberation, he determined to discard that delicacy which had made him abstain from any attempt to see Mercedes, and now to request to do so in order to incite her to face the irremediable difficulties of her situation as soon as possible. He easily foresaw that a time might arrive when the belief of being under pecuniary obligations to Lady Sylvester might be a most painful burden to Miss Ratcliffe; and he resolved, though he must do violence to his own feelings and to hers, to make known to her the real footing on which she stood. He found on mentioning his desire to Lady Sylvester, that she had not as yet communicated his arrival to Mercedes; she now offered to do so, but as to his further request, she replied with an air of astonishment and hauteur:

“ You cannot really mean to ask this : it is impossible for her to comply with your wish.”

“ Why so ?” replied Lord Sylvester drily. “ As I came here solely to serve Miss Ratcliffe, I do not intend to depart without hearing from her own lips how I can best do so. I do not see the impossibility of which you speak, nor, perhaps, will she.”

Lady Sylvester, though greatly alarmed and displeased at this proposition, did not dare to refuse compliance. She went to perform her task, and when she returned, in an altered tone, she said :

“ You were right ; Mercedes will see you. She is quite as anxious to do so as you could desire. She is going to rise for the first time, and will see you as soon after noon as you please. Fix your hour, and I will be ready to accompany you to her.”

“ Thank you,” replied Lord Sylvester, in no degree relaxing from his former inflexibility. “ I should wish to visit Miss Ratcliffe alone. Painful this interview must be, and I believe that it will be far better for me to see her alone, than in the presence of any other person.”

Lady Sylvester could not venture on the expression of any dissatisfaction, eager as she was to be relieved from the embarrassments of her present situation.

When Lord Sylvester prepared for this interview he remembered the letter which Julian had entrusted to him, and resolved to take this opportunity of fulfilling his injunctions with respect to it

At length the appointed hour arrived, and Lady Sylvester conducted him to the door of the chamber in which was Mercedes. When he entered and beheld her whom he had left so young, so bright and blooming, he was inexpressibly shocked, and the idea crossed his mind that she was destined to be but for a little while the sport of fortune, or the victim of unkindness. She lay upon a couch, and her frame seemed attenuated and enfeebled to an almost incredible degree. The colour had entirely fled from her cheek and lips, and the ghastly paleness of her hue was increased by her mournful garb, and the heavy negligent tresses of her dark hair that hung around her face. For some time she did not make any attempt to speak or to move; a cold dew stood upon her face, which assumed even a more ashy paleness. She could not weep, tears were denied her; she felt a death-like oppression, and lay almost insensible, and more resembling a marble statue than a living being.

Lord Sylvester, in spite of his efforts, in spite of his desire for her sake to be calm, could not refrain from tears. He seated himself beside her, and taking one of her hands, which was icy as death, pressed it tenderly to his lips, saying in a voice scarcely audible from emotion :

“ Mercedes, I must be your brother. You must henceforward think of me in no other light. You must lay your cares upon me. Speak to me, Mercedes, it will relieve you to tell all that lies at your heart. You must not think yourself alone.”

Mercedes drew away the hand he held, and joining it to her other, clasped them upon her breast, and raising her eyes with fervour to Heaven, she murmured :

“No, I am not alone !”

Her lips continued moving as if in prayer, and even in that hour of anguish Lord Sylvester perceived the dawning of holy peace within her troubled breast. After a pause he said gently :

“Will you accept me as a brother, Mercedes ?”

“Yes,” replied Mercedes, in a low voice, and with a shudder she added, “until you change.”

“So be it,” answered Lord Sylvester, solemnly, “until I change.” He paused, then he continued, “If I am to be your brother you must let me tell you what I would counsel you to do. I have already thought on what will be best for you, and I will arrange every thing, and render it easy and practicable, if you will follow my advice. But shall I leave you now and come again ?”

“No,” exclaimed Mercedes, “stay with me now. Oh !” she said, for the first time bursting into tears, “indeed I do not desire to be so much alone.”

Lord Sylvester touched by these words, let her weep unrestrainedly, and offered no comment on her tears. As she became gradually composed again, he told her that he advised her, as soon as she could travel, to proceed at once to England under Lady Sylvester’s protection ; he explained to her that he would prevent, by his previous arrangements, any of the cares of the journey from devolving on her, and besought her

not to hesitate to allow him for the present to afford her every facility in her return home that was necessary. He said his own arrival in England would probably be but a few months later, and he implored her not to turn her thoughts to the transaction of business, until he or some other friend on whom she could rely, was on the spot with her. "It will be only harassing your mind uselessly, and, I believe, that your interests are as safe as they can be, in the hands of Maxwell and of the executors, who are men of high character." He ended by giving her Julian's letter, which he advised her to transmit to his mother as soon as possible, and also to apply to any of her own relatives whom she should select as soon as she reached England. He tried to hold out hopes of kindness on Lady Sylvester's part, but more particularly added: "in Wilmot you have a friend actuated by the most devoted sentiments of gratitude, and prepared to serve you at the cost of any efforts or sacrifices, and I doubt not that Mrs. Wilmot will welcome you with a mother's love."

To these kind and soothing words, Mercedes listened with silent tears. She acquiesced in all Lord Sylvester's suggestions, nor could she refuse services which were absolutely indispensable. She comforted herself with the hope which Lord Sylvester lent her every encouragement to entertain, that the pecuniary favours she was constrained to accept were but of a temporary nature, and though she made no complaints, and scarcely any allusions to her friend-

lessness, nor spoke of Lady Sylvester's altered tone, she could not listen without evident satisfaction, while Lord Sylvester made her aware that all her former friend would now bestow upon her, was a continuance of her protection, and that she would not, in their journey homewards, have to exchange situations with her, and to receive from her hands those gifts which she had formerly so lavishly bestowed. Though Mercedes scarcely mentioned Lady Sylvester and never once her son, Lord Sylvester discovered, without difficulty, that her opinions had undergone a complete change with regard to them. Lord Sylvester finally informed her, that after he had completed all requisite arrangements, he should again leave Rome. When she heard this, she bid him bear her thanks to Julian, and strove to thank him herself, but words could not express the depth of her feelings, and she saw him depart in silence and tears more eloquent than language could have been.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Still on Him that died
Thine eye shall dwell. Thy feet may totter 'neath
Thy daily cross of sufferings, yet on Him
Thy soul shall feed, till
Upon thy drooping soul there seem to smile
Unearthly peace.

THOUGHTS IN PAST YEARS.

WHEN again deprived, by Lord Sylvester's departure, of the solacing presence of a sincere friend, Mercedes felt more than ever wretched. Her misery became almost insupportable, and at times she contemplated her situation with dismay, deeming it impossible that in such intolerable anguish, she could continue to possess life and reason; one or the other would surely abandon her. A command to lay down the first would have been a glad bidding to the unhappy orphan, and in hours of distraction she would sometimes exclaim :

“ Oh, when will the hour of death come ! What pains of death could compare to these ! When may I die ! When may I go hence, and be no more seen ! ”

But there was another voice besides that of Nature speaking in Mercedes' bosom, and while the latter cried loudly in the wildest accents of woe, the first in still small tones, the clear sweet-

ness of which, made them heard in spite of the shrill din of tumultuous passion, uttered soothing truths of a nature so divine, that they rendered her gradually inaccessible to all contrary thoughts, and filled her mind with a strength that overcame all warring adversaries of her peace, and gave her the mastery in that conflict, wherein He who made the human heart in which lies the battlefield of mortal strife, can alone be victorious.

Grief may be forcibly expelled from the heart it has invaded. The aid of exterior things when sought, and is sometimes powerful enough to obtain possession of that place to which grief had advanced a claim. The call to mourning is forgotten, and reckless mirth is by force installed where sorrow should be sitting upon the ground. These measures are desperate, and their result is fatal, for those who employ them do but cry 'peace, peace, where there is no peace,' and for ever forego that blessing which is promised to those who mourn. But Mercedes had no temptation to act thus. There were no exterior circumstances around her to distract her from herself, and bear her away from her grief; she was forced to encounter it in all its sternness: but she discovered other and better means of divesting its sting of half its poignancy, and of fortifying herself against the inroads of an enemy, who, contemplated from afar, appeared invincible. She found that feeble and timid as she was, could she assume that armour which is prepared and appointed for all the soldiers of

Christ,—for the weak and sickly not too weighty, and equally indispensable for the strong and the experienced—she would be endued with a strength to resist, and a fortitude to endure that no adversaries nor hardships could quell. She felt that the unceasing contemplation of gospel truths, the unceasing study of gospel precepts, afforded to her fainting soul that support which wholesome food gives to the body. Perpetually drinking at that fountain from which she found that she drew living waters, Mercedes rose up refreshed, invigorated, and enabled to stem the torrent of ill-fortune with a resolution that amazed Lady Sylvester, who had known her ‘in her softer hours,’ and little disposed to give her credit for innate vigour of character, was at a loss to discover the origin of that strength which she now displayed.

To her eyes it was not discernible, that from the germ of religion, when firmly rooted in the heart, springs up a goodly tree overshadowing the land, beneath whose branches, the believing pilgrim on his journey, finds an acceptable shelter from the blasts of the East wind in the day of adversity, and from the scorching rays of the noontide sun in the day of prosperity, secured alike from the dangers of either extreme. She had not discovered in the gentleness, sweetness, and truth that marked Mercedes’ character; in the total absence of art, and of every feeling of jealousy and malice; in the warm generosity and benevolence of her heart;—the uninterrupted sway of one pervading principle,

to which every sentiment was in subjection. She believed her happy in the enjoyment of an amiability of disposition, equally a source of delight to herself and to her friends, but as merely accidental as high or low stature, dark or fair hair. She acknowledged readily in the day of prosperity,

Her bounty, sweetness, beauty, goodness, such
That none e'er thought her happiness too much.
So well inclined her favours to confer,
And kind to all as Heaven had been to her.

But her knowledge of the faultlessness of Mercedes' conduct in her former situation had not led her to look for a display of qualities befitting the reverse of fortune which she had experienced. She saw not that Mercedes was still under the direction of the same guide, still actuated by the same spirit; that she had one sole example to which she strove to be conformed. That of Him whose precepts inculcate alike self-abasement in the hour of greatness, and serenity, and patience in that of suffering:—who led her to seek the lowest seat in the house of feasting, and bid her be grateful, were it but for the crumbs that fell from the children's table:—who taught her by His own example not to withdraw her lips from the bitterest cup whereof humanity can drink; nor did she seek to turn away from it, for it was given her to see that it was His hand that proffered it to her, and she drank of the draught, and found that there was health in it.

Mercedes soon understood that the best mode of strengthening herself to bear the present, was

by resolutely closing her eyes to the future. She determined to fulfil to the letter the injunction to take no thought for the morrow, and to apply herself solely to that task which called for all her vigour, the endurance of her existing sorrow. By this means she shut out the crowd of imaginary evils, perhaps never to be realised, and sufficient indeed for the day was the evil thereof. She had to accustom her sad heart to bear with the knowledge that her beloved father was dead—that she never was to see him again—never to cling to his bosom again—never to speak to him again—never to be spoken to by his voice again—never to consult him again—never to ask any favour or indulgence from him again—never to cheer him in hours of fatigue or depression again—never to share the buoyancy of mirth with him again—never to kneel at Heaven's throne with him again—never again to enter with him the visible temple of their God, together to utter praises and offer prayers.

This was enough. Mercedes felt that it was better to strive to reconcile herself to this grief before she went on to encounter others; before she went on to calculate future evils, and the difficulties, dangers, and distress, that probably awaited her on her return to her native land. Conscious that she was destitute of any means of making provision against the coming tempest, she averted her eyes from the gloomy prospect.

Faith was her comfort, faith her stay.
She trusted woe would pass away,
And evil yield to good.

She knew that dark as were the clouds that now lowered, they might unexpectedly be illumined, or even dissipated by a sudden ray of sunshine. If she looked onward to the future, it was to one more distant still, but the promises of which were secure; her gaze was directed far on to the land which is "a delightful land;" where the glorious sun "shall no more go down," never yielding to the shades of night, for sleep is not needed to refresh the weary, nor to bring forgetfulness to the wretched, for there "the days of mourning are ended."

Thus abstracted from the cares of this world, thus fortified against its keenest sorrows, the same means enabled Mercedes also to submit in patience to all the inferior wounds, provocations, and slights, which she too frequently received from her heartless companion:

Yoked in her gentle mood
To stern annoyances of petty strife
That weary the worn spirit out of life.

She manifested no resentment, whatever were the unkindnesses of Lady Sylvester, and they were many—not always definable, but not therefore the less galling. The indelicacy with which she would fall on topics which Mercedes scarcely dared to approach in thought—remembrances which in the night season would steal into her mind when between sleeping and waking, making her restlessly change her position, as if to escape from the pressure of a crushing weight, or to remove out of

sight of the agonizing vision that rose up before her—phantoms which, haunting her, would sometimes cause her to start up from her sleep, waking herself by the sharp cry of anguish which she uttered—forebodings which she did not dare to investigate, but whenever they suggested themselves, would strive to turn speedily to some thought, or better still, some occupation distinct from the subjects which gave them birth—all these sources of exquisite pain were but too often opened by a careless word, an unkind hasty expression, an ill-timed counsel, a cruel hint from the lips of Lady Sylvester. Still she never by a gesture of impatience, but seldom by a burst of supplicatory tears, rebuked her half wilful, half unconscious tormentor.

Lady Sylvester herself was beyond measure astonished at the extraordinary calmness and equanimity maintained by Miss Ratcliffe; and, unnatural and barbarous as it may seem, she was at times incensed by it. She one day declared to a lady, who remarked on it in terms of mingled surprise and admiration, that for her part the girl's insensibility absolutely amazed her. "She never seems," she exclaimed, "to feel that she is, in all probability, a beggar—that she has lost station, respectability, every thing!"

"I think she feels that she has lost a father," was the reply which brought a tinge of shame to Lady Sylvester's cheek, and her reprover longed to

add: "Perhaps also she knows that she has lost a friend." But the speaker was one whom intercourse with the world had habituated to the mental reservation of those unwelcome truths which her penetration discovered ; so she said no more.

END OF VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

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THIS TALE
IS INSCRIBED TO
MY SISTER.

For thee,—my own sweet sister—in thy heart
I know myself secure, as thou in mine.
We were and are—I am even as thou art—
Beings who ne'er each other can resign.
It is the same—together or apart—
From life's commencement to its slow decline,
We are entwined.

BYRON.

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